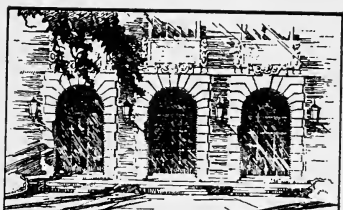


SARAH:

A SURVIVAL

Sydney Christian

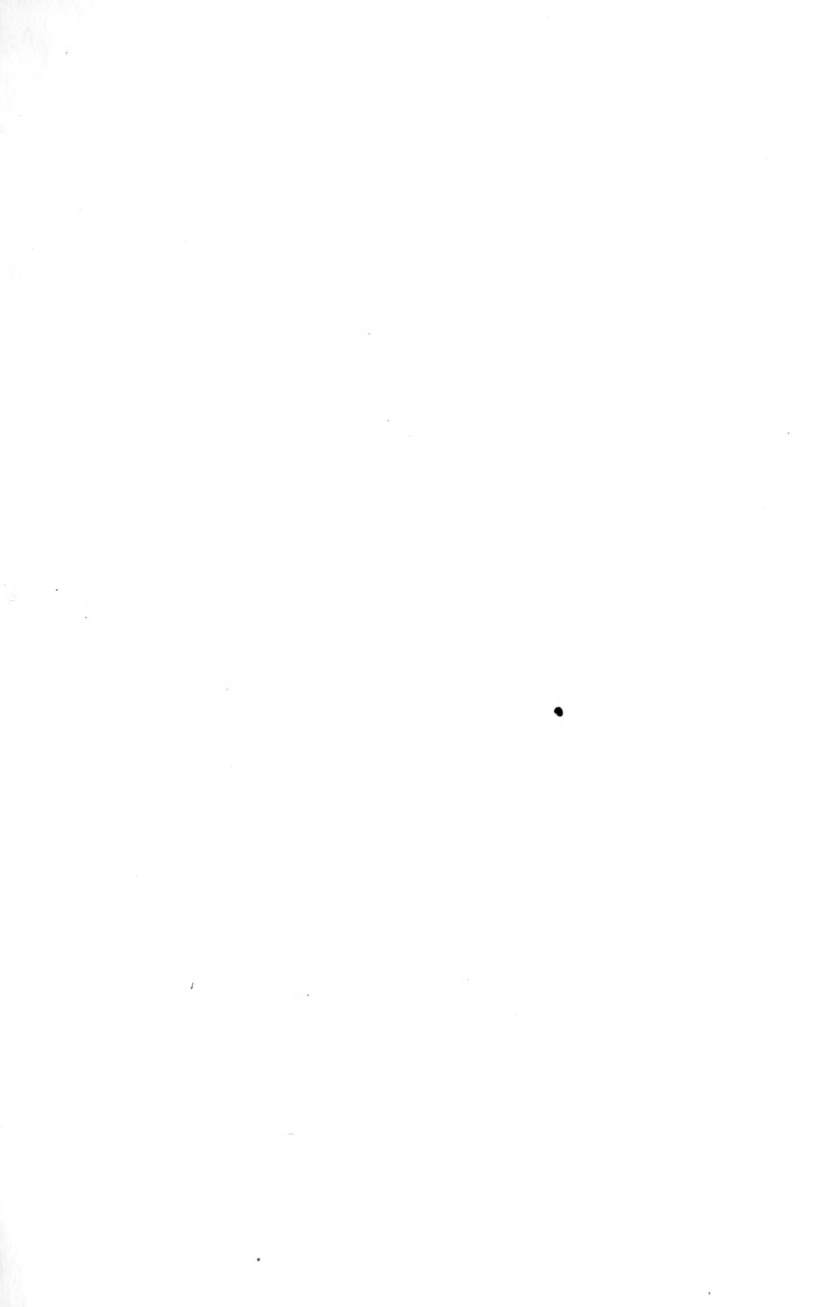


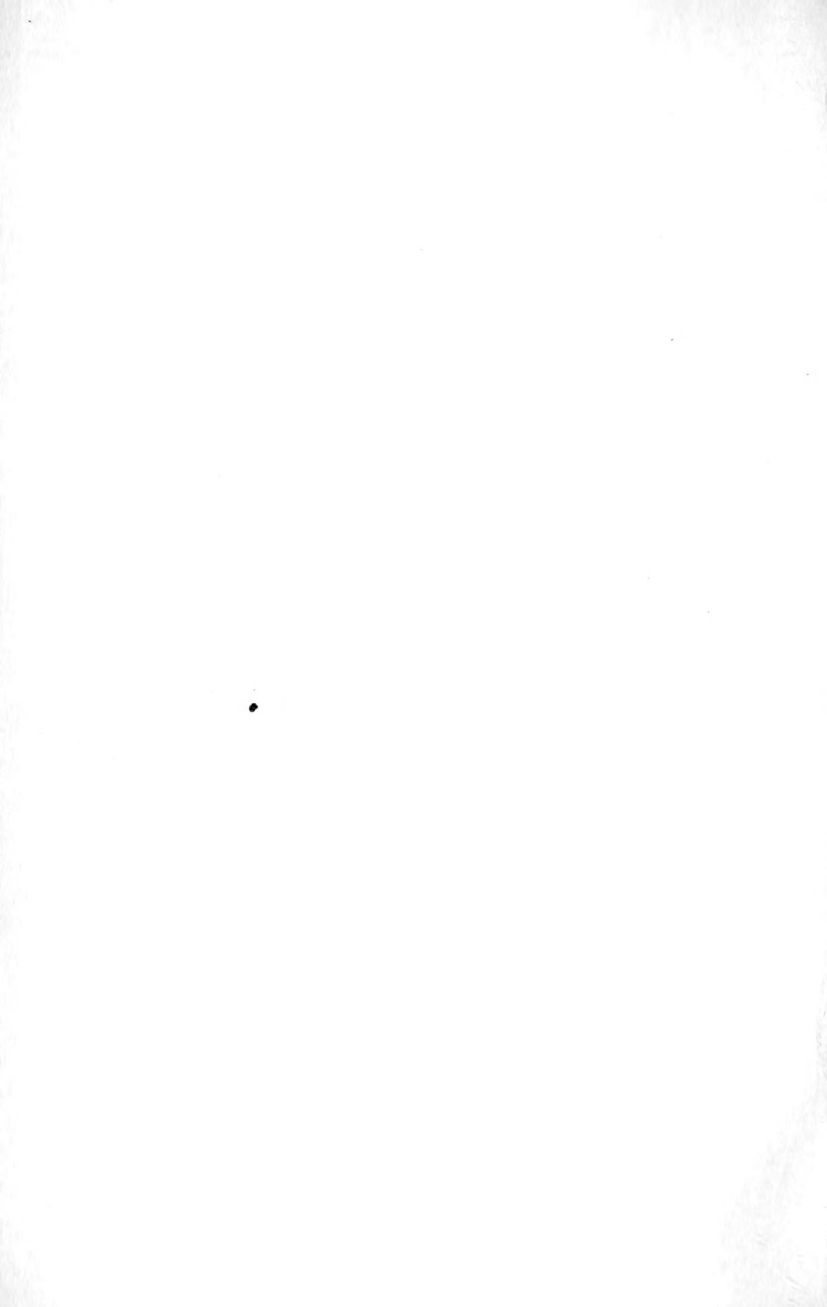
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SARAH: A SURVIVAL.



SARAH: A SURVIVAL

BY

SYDNEY CHRISTIAN,

AUTHOR OF "LYDIA."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO
EMILY,
THE STEADFAST STRENGTH OF WHOSE LIFE
IS MY BEST INSPIRATION.

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PART I.

THE THORNBOROUGHS OF MEADS.

“I am not yet come to that degree of wisdom to think light of the sex of whom I have my life, since, if I be anything, I was to come to it, born of a woman, and nursed of a woman. . . .

“And truly we men, and praisers of men, should remember, that if we have such excellencies, it is reason to think them excellent creatures of whom we are ; since a kite never brought forth a good flying hawk.”



SARAH: A SURVIVAL.



CHAPTER I.

"CHILDREN are a great responsibility, Dan."

"They are, Rachel."

"Especially girls."

"Especially boys, Rachel."

"I fear they may be in mischief or danger even now."

"It is very likely."

"Shall we go and seek for them, Dan?"

"I think it might be wise; there is much water in the pond, owing to these recent rains. I trust they may not have wandered into the top field."

"Little Sarah is often disobedient, Dan."

"And Gideon over-venturesome for his

years. Come, Rachel, we will go up through the kitchen garden."

The speakers were a little elderly lady and a tall elderly gentleman ; a glance told that they were brother and sister. They had the same amount of silver in their curls, the same keen eyes and straight noses, the same benevolent expression and finely curved lips. But there was a twinkle of humour in the eyes of the brother, and there were lines of thoughtfulness on his brow which were absent in the equally vigorous, but less clever face of the sister. All his movements, and the tones of his voice, were full of a leisurely indulgence, while hers were quick and decisive, as of one who rarely sees the need for changing their mind.

The Thornboroughs had for generations lived at Meads. They had been in the Church and in the Army and in the Navy. There had been among them eminent Divines, Generals, and Admirals, also many worthy country gentlemen, who had taken wives from wealthy county families and lived useful and comfortable country lives at Meads.

Theirs was a Puritan family. Many a Mercy, Sarah, or Rebekah figured in the family tree, many a Matthew and Jonathan and Samuel. Their men had been for the most part reliable, unbending, unimaginative, their women strong, domestic, well-favoured. Here and there had been a departure, as in the case of wild Will Thornborough, who generally drunk as a lord, married the lovely daughter of a travelling tinker, rode with her on Black Angel to the gates of Meads, which his father shut in his face, rode away cursing through Thornborough woods, and there shot his bride and himself. People did say it was all because Dorothy Howard had refused him, scared at his drinking habits, but, after three centuries, who shall say? Also there had been a Jasper Thornborough, a courteous gentleman of the road, and a lovely Diana Thornborough, who had left her stern husband to follow the fortunes of a gay young squire. Valiant and proud and impatient of restraint were all the Thornboroughs, "There has not been a tame man among us, nor an ugly

woman," Dan Thornborough was often heard to say.

Dan, Jasper, Rachel, and Jael were the four children of the last owner of Meads. Dan, the eldest, had, on the early death of his father, taken the management of the estate. Jasper entered the Army, married the penniless daughter of a brother officer, went to India, and, after some years, died there a widower. He had sent Mabel, the elder of his two children, to his wife's family, and the younger, Sarah, to the old home to the charge of his brother and his unmarried sister Rachel. Jael Thornborough had been the beauty of the county. A fascinating, bewildering beauty, with wonderful dark eyes, straight brows, a figure like a tall, strong pine, and brilliant lips and cheeks. Dan and Rachel had a tolerably lively time of it so long as Jael remained at home, for her love-affairs were many, often tragic and always interesting, and the brothers and sisters had no secrets. Beautiful, bewildering Jael was finally wooed and won by Sir Godolphin Leigh, of Leigh Court, in the next

county. They had three children who were all carried off by a malignant fever; then a boy was born who was christened "Gideon Godolphin," after Jael's father and her husband, and when the boy was five years old his beautiful mother died. It was not long before Sir Godolphin Leigh married again, and Meads became as much Gideon's home as Leigh Court, for a new family began to spring up there, and his young step-mother recognized the claims the Thornboroughs had on the boy, and spared him and welcomed him with equal fervour. Thus it happened that the two little cousins, Gideon Leigh and Sarah Thornborough, were brought up together at Meads by their childless uncle and aunt.

Meads had been a much larger property than it was when Dan Thornborough's father inherited it. The old Thornborough woods with their fine timber had been, two generations back, much curtailed, and small farms had been sold. It now consisted of some seven thousand acres, and there was not an operation carried on on any portion

of them which Dan Thornborough did not thoroughly understand himself, and over which he had not consulted with Jacob Frant.

The Frants had served the Thornboroughs for generations; there had always been a Frant at the head of the stables, the garden, the kitchen, and many younger Frants as garden boys and house-servants. Mrs. Frant was at this time head in the kitchen; her son, "Old George" (though he was still in the forties), was head in the stables; "Young George," his son, watched with zealous care over the children's ponies; and Susan his daughter was little Sarah's nurse. But it was "Mr. Frant," Mrs. Frant's brother, the head of the Frant family, as Dan was head of the Thornboroughs, to whom the whole of the serving establishment of Meads looked up with reverence. Everybody called him "Mr. Frant;" only his master and mistress were allowed the familiarity of using his Christian name "Jacob." Jacob Frant was bailiff, as his father had been before him, and had been in his youth

publicly horsewhipped by old Jonathan Thornborough, Dan's grandfather. It was at the annual fair, and young Jacob had been spied, by the eagle eye of old Jonathan, gambling and drinking in a booth. The master had just driven on to the field with his family, and the Leighs and the Howards. His jovial, handsome face was lighted with a smile, but it clouded over as his glance recognized young Jacob Frant, and jumping from his seat, whip in hand, he strode into the booth, seized the lad by the collar, and then and there thrashed him. "You are the first Frant that has disgraced his father's name," he shouted; "what do you mean by it?" For a Thornborough to execute justice on a Frant was quite the natural order of things, and young Jacob, as he slunk home, away from the enticing hilarities of the fair, cherished no feelings of rebellion against his master. The only thing that stung him as he trudged along the hot road, was that Miss Rachel and Miss Jael should have witnessed his disgrace. He betook himself to the hayloft and wept there. But towards

nightfall, when the family had returned, two childish voices at the foot of the ladder cried, "Jacob, come down; we know you are up there;" and Jacob Frant stared down through the trap-door to see his two little mistresses in their white muslin frocks eagerly looking up at him.

"Grandpa has forgiven you now, Jacob. What a dirty place you were in! Oh, we *were* so sorry, weren't we, Jael?"

The great boy slid down the ladder, and the two little girls lifted their clean sweet faces and kissed him with their red lips. Thus began and ended Jacob Frant's gambling days; he grew up and settled down and followed in his father's shoes as bailiff, as was right and meet for a Frant to do.

Sunday at Meads was kept by the present family exactly as their predecessors had kept it. The church was five miles away, and it was necessary to start betimes. The rule of the house was that the entire household attended Morning Service; the tradition being that no harm could come to a house while its owners were doing their duty. The old

coach, only used on Sundays, came round punctually at ten o'clock; on to its roof scrambled, or decorously mounted, as many of the family and servants as there was room for, the rest packed inside. The reigning Thornborough always drove, the reigning Frant always brought away the key of the back premises. As they passed the lodge, the coach stopped to allow as many of its inmates as could be spared to mount also, and then the horses were whipped up and away at a rattling pace, to the old church with its galleries and three-decker.

The only exceptions to this rule were when there were Thornboroughs in the cradle, too young to go, or Thornboroughs in the great dining-room armchair, too old to go. Then a Frant stayed at home with them, rocked the former, or read aloud the Morning Service to the latter.

The Thornborough pew was square and large and private; when the red moreen curtains were drawn close along their brass rods nobody could see either in or out, unless a man of six feet four or five, as Jonathan

Thornborough had been, happened to be there.

There was a fireplace in the pew, at which long-departed Thornboroughs had dried their wet shoes and coats and pelisses, when in bygone days it had been considered a sin to make use on a Sabbath day of anything but their own sturdy legs, and both the men and the women had battled the whole five miles to service through rain, or wind, or snow. On hot days those curtains were very convenient; many a Thornborough, both young and old, had slumbered peacefully behind them during the sermon, with their feet comfortably stretched out on the great red hassocks.

Piled up in the corner were large clasped Bibles and Prayer and Hymn books, many of them containing woodcuts and maps, and dedications, and illuminated 'tail-pieces. There were books also which were not used in the service; books brought there by the Thornboroughs whose names figured on the tablets on the wall above, or on the flat floor stones up the aisles, to wile away the

hours between morning and afternoon service. There was Quarles's "Emblems," "The Saint's Rest," "Meditations among the Tombs," Drelincourt on "Death," and on the shelf in the corner lay the old Dutch Bible, bound in faded calf, with its two great clasps of curious brasswork, its broad marker of frayed crimson ribbon, and its wonderful woodcuts. Its thin leaves, so thin that the letters on the reverse side seemed nearly printed through, and hindered the reading of the open page, were always placed open, by the Clerk, at the first morning lesson, the red marker he put at the second. The Clerk would as soon have omitted to do this as to have omitted doing the same by the Bible on the reading-desk.

The Thornborough pew was built against the reading-desk; above it sat the Clerk, in his walled-in box; over his head the Curate read the Prayers; and over him again, in the third story, the Rector preached his fifty-minutes sermon in black gown and bands. Over the Rector's head was a canopy of oak,

carved with pomegranates, and ornamented with oak cherubs, who blew brazen trumpets to the four corners of the church.

The collections were made in a copper bowl fastened to the end of a long rod, which saved the congregation all trouble except that of dropping their money in. To see this rod thrust into their pew through the red curtains was one of the Sunday excitements to Gideon Leigh and Sarah Thornborough. Another excitement which Gideon could remember seeing once or twice was the Leigh Court equipage driving up to the church. Old Madam Leigh was Sir Godolphin's grandmother, a tiny figure, well on in the eighties, her shrewd face peeping out of her lavender silk bonnet, overshadowed by its costly Brussels lace veil, and her feet encased in black satin shoes, which stepped daintily forth from under her lavender silk gown. Her great carriage was upholstered throughout with faded grey damask; her old coachman sat on his grey-fringed hammercloth, his ancient head carefully powdered, his solemn eyes

fixed on his sleek grey horses; her two men-servants stood behind, holding on to the straps, their powdered hair and silken calves the envy of all the villagers. Madam Leigh had driven all her life in this pomp to her own church, and deserted it for the town only when the new Rector had begun to preach in his surplice, which "Popish performance," a Leigh could by no means tolerate.

It was once when driving thus in state, accompanied by her grandson, that she had encountered the Thornborough coach tearing down the road, and driven, not by Jonathan Thornborough, as she was accustomed to see, but by his daring, brilliant granddaughter Jael, whose dark curls and plumed hat were waving in the rush of wind as she urged the horses on with wild speed. The loaded coach swayed in its headlong course, the steady old Leigh Court chariot rumbled aside, as Jael's laughing eyes flashed into Godolphin's Leigh's, and his heart bounded to meet her, while the two staid men-servants, standing up behind, privately grinned their

admiration of the coach and its dazzling driver.

All this was over now. Madam Leigh and her old coachman had both gone to their fathers, the damask-lined chariot was kept in state as a thing of the past, Sir Godolphin Leigh walked soberly the few yards into his own church, and the Thornborough coach was as soberly driven by Dan Thornborough, with only his sister Rachel beside him, and comparatively few Frants behind and inside.

But now children had come once more to clamber up on to its roof, and to enliven the too quiet drive with their dangerous pranks and incessant talk. For Gideon and Sarah bid fair to revive once more the exciting days of Jael and old Jonathan.

Gideon Leigh was acquainted with the top of the coach long before his cousin Sarah Thornborough came to share its joys with him. Many a long Sunday morning had the boy sat in the corner of the great pew and amused himself by turning over the books, while his aunt Rachel sat bolt

upright gazing at the preacher, and his uncle Dan dozed, or made notes with a view to controverting uncertain points in the sermon the next time he and the Rector met.

It was in the summer that Uncle Dan dozed, and in the winter that he made notes, but in any case he never interfered with the little boy sitting so still on the red hassock beside him, and apparently deep in "Olney Hymns," or "The Compleat Angler." Uncle Dan chuckled to himself. Did he not know those books well? Had they not served to break the monotony of the long service in his own boyhood, when his father had punished even a stifled yawn or a momentary closed eye?

And now his shrewd eyes twinkled with delight whenever they rested on Gideon Leigh, his nephew, also poring over them.

"The Compleat Angler's" binding was worn and scratched, there were flies pressed between its leaves, and on its stained first page was written in faded ink: "This is my book, Jasper Thornborough, 1715." Dan's

brother had been named after this Jasper. How had it got to church? The sober binding was very like all the other devotional books. Had it arrived by accident in the pew, or had it been brought by that great angler Jasper Thornborough, who could not resist reading even in church that, "'Tis noted that the Tench and Eel love mud, and the Carp loves gravelly ground, and in the hot months to feed on grass"?

At any rate there it had lain for the past hundred years, and with it lay now, "Olney Hymns, in Three Books," 1812. Eagerly little Gideon would turn to the end of this last, where "The Kite ; or, Pride must have a Fall," "The Spider and Toad," offered their fascinations. The child knew them all by heart. The words—

"See how yon crowds of gazing people
Admire my flight above the steeple,"

always got mixed up in his mind with the hymns when they were given out, except on the rare and delightful occasions when the hymn about "Gideon" was sung—Gideon, who was the hero of his young mind.

“Who ordered Gideon forth
To storm the invaders’ camp
With arms of little worth,
A pitcher and a lamp.
The trumpets made his coming known,
And all the host was overthrown.”

Gideon Leigh meant to be a soldier when he grew up. He told his uncle so one hot Sunday afternoon, when he was trotting beside him on the quiet stroll to visit the pigs and the chickens and the young turkeys, and Uncle Dan remembered that the “Gideon hymn,” as his nephew called it, had been sung at Morning Service. For the most part the solitary child kept his ideas to himself, he and Uncle Dan understood each other without many words, but when he heard that his little cousin was coming to live at Meads, one of his first thoughts was, “I shall tell Sarah I am going to be a soldier like Uncle Jasper, her father, was.”

What an excitement prevailed in the household when the week after the child’s arrival Miss Thornborough decided that her niece was to go to church! Little Sarah

had not shown such signs of docility as to allow the decision to be heard by the household with entire satisfaction. She was a fearless, merry child, and had already burst into silvery laughter in the middle of morning prayers, trotted about the room when there were visitors and made friends with them all, torn off the black ribbon with which Susan Frant had tied her hair, and demanded "a nice red one, like papa let me wear."

On this Sabbath, owing to Gideon's exertions to amuse her all the way to church, she behaved rationally till the red-shrouded pew was reached, when she proceeded to draw a dilapidated negro doll from her small pocket, and announced to Gideon, "*Now* we can play dolls in this nice dolls' house."

In vain Aunt Rachel exhibited the attractions of a new gilt-edged Prayer-book, in vain Uncle Dan lifted her up on to the seat beside him, and let her look out between the moreen curtains at the assembling congregation. She was quiet for a time, but at

last slid down, clutching Uncle Dan's legs, clothed in dazzling duck, reached a high red hassock, and cried fervently, "Oh, Gideon, help me to put Queen Victoria to bed!"

The boy looked askance at his uncle and aunt: the Rector's voice was just beginning, "When the wicked man," the congregation had risen, it was an awful moment; suppose that child's clear voice should suddenly make further revelations about "Queen Victoria." Uncle Dan's lips were twitching, Aunt Rachel looked in despair. Sarah, all unconscious, began crooning a lullaby to herself, rocking vehemently the extremely small doll, and showing all her pearly teeth as she cheerfully smiled up in Uncle Dan's face. The crooning lullaby grew louder, the Clerk stared severely down into the pew. Gideon waited no longer, but, dragging his hassock up to his cousin, he reached out a hand for "Olney Hymns" and the "Compleat Angler," and soon the two small heads were close together; the low murmuring which followed might easily be mistaken for devout praying, and Aunt Rachel breathed

again. She knew nothing about those two books, she had never doubted that they were Prayer or Hymn books, and knelt rejoicing in the power of the Spirit that could so work on infant minds as to endow the long prayers with interest, even for a baby like Sarah.

Never had Gideon spent such a frivolous Sunday morning.

The boy had managed to make Sarah understand that no talking, or, at any rate, only whispers, was the order of the day, and that out of that "dolls' house" they could not go till Uncle Dan might choose to turn the brass button on its drab painted door and march out himself.

Up and down she trotted, the hassocks now here, now there. "Queen Victoria," wrapped tight in her own tiny pocket-handkerchief, was put to sleep alternately inside the crown of Uncle Dan's hat and on the silk train of Aunt Rachel's dress, where it rested on the floor. Then she climbed up on the seat again, and was quiet so long during the First Lesson that Gideon got up beside her

to see what she was looking at between the curtains.

"Look," she whispered anxiously. "He's asleep, and his head is shining, and there's a large wasp."

Gideon dragged her down from the contemplation of the bald-headed gentleman, and closed the curtains. Looking round in search of fresh distraction she caught sight of Uncle Dan's seals, which hung at his old-fashioned watch-chain.

Without more ado she clambered on to his knee, and he was guilty of pushing aside the old Dutch Bible and amusing his niece till the reading of the Lesson was over. Tired out at last, she lay down on the floor, and, leaning her head against Gideon as he sat sleepily on a hassock, she went fast asleep. Seeing his nephew presently begin to nod, Uncle Dan cautiously drew the hassock near enough for the boy to lean against him, and the children slept tranquilly through the rest of the service. But Uncle Dan presented the remarkable spectacle of sitting down all through the hymns and the final blessing

for the first time in his life, in spite of a severe whisper from his sister that, "It will not do to begin by letting that child rule us; better wake them up. Gideon has never gone to sleep in church before."

Her brother waved his hand deprecatingly, and whispered back again, "Accept the omen; the boy has found his fate, and the child will rule us all."

He was right. Aunt, uncle, cousin, and the entire Frant clan fell under her baby fascinations, and the sway of Sarah Thornborough lasted on at Meads for many a long year after its beginning in the old red-curtained pew.

After that, two years glided peacefully by. The useful monotonous days were only broken by Sarah's vagaries, or by Gideon's visits to Leigh Court, whence he always returned with more and more passionate fondness for Meads.

It was on a spring Sunday afternoon, Gideon's tenth birthday, little Sarah being seven, that their uncle and aunt held the conversation about them with which these

pages open. Terrible experiences they had lately had, Gideon had nearly cut his leg off with a scythe, and Sarah had been hardly rescued from an open cistern. Never were two more daring children. The lives of the Frants were a burden to them by reason of the ceaseless and unlooked-for perils into which the two combined to place themselves. So it was with an anxious sigh that Aunt Rachel followed her brother in search of them, up through the kitchen garden and into the top field where the great barn stood.

Sunday afternoon calm reigned around them ; across the orchard Jacob Frant was leisurely strolling with his pipe and his dogs ; leaning over the pig-sty wall Young George was discernible, gossiping in company with another youth ; to the right, in the meadow, ruminating peacefully, were Dan Thornborough's choice Alderneys ; further on the long grass swayed gently in the breeze abiding the haying time. But there was no sound of child's laughter to be heard, no sturdy children's figures to be seen.

"They have done wrong to stray away," remarked Aunt Rachel. "I set Gideon the seventy-fifth Psalm to learn before tea, and he was to teach little Sarah—

" 'Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,
Make me teachable and mild.' "

I fear he has forgotten to do so, for they were not in the schoolroom as I passed."

"Is the seventy-fifth Psalm a very long one?" asked her brother.

"It is but ten verses—as many as his years. He has been boastful of late before Young George, therefore I laid special stress upon the words 'Speak not with a stiff neck. God is the Judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.' "

"I wonder if little Sarah understands that hymn? I remember learning it when I was a lad, 'Make me teachable and mild.' Bless me, I'm neither one nor the other, even after all these years."

"I am sure, Dan, you never had a froward heart," his sister indignantly replied. "That child is very wayward; the discipline

of learning is good for her, though, to be sure, it is little discipline, for she learns without any trouble, and Gideon has a rare gift for teaching."

Her brother did not answer, his eyes were fixed upon a small black object on the loose hay at the foot of one of the stacks they were approaching. His sister's eyes followed his.

"It is Jael's old school Bible," she cried. "I gave it to Gideon to learn out of; they cannot be far off."

Dan Thornborough stood still and shouted. There was no answer. His sister picked up the little worn Bible. A folded piece of paper kept the place of the seventy-fifth Psalm; on it was inscribed, in Gideon's large childish hand, the verse of the hymn he had been set to teach Sarah.

"Good boy, he has not then been disobedient, I trust," remarked his aunt with satisfaction.

Uncle Dan shouted again.

"We had better return to the house," he said finally.

They did so, approaching it from the

opposite side they had started from. They were too anxious to exchange any remarks, only, as they passed the pig-sty, Young George was ordered to come and help look for the children. On the way they were joined by Jacob Frant and a garden-boy. The procession came round to the ivy-covered side of the house.

“Who has left that ladder there?” demanded Dan Thornborough, sharply, as he hurried on ahead; but none of the party knew.

High up on the topmost rung of the ladder, where it ended in the ivy-covered gables, Gideon Leigh was discernible, holding on with one hand, while the other was stretched out towards something he was trying to reach. On the next rung below him stood Sarah, clutching with both fat hands the sides of the ladder, while the breeze blew her white pinafore and her yellow curls out behind her into space. Aunt Rachel uttered an exclamation of horror, and cried—

“Birds’-nesting on the Sabbath, naughty children!”

Uncle Dan put his hand on her arm.

"Hush!" he said, "do not speak or we shall startle them and they may lose their balance."

Aunt Rachel grew white, but she repressed her inclination to call out. Jacob Frant's face wore a grim smile as he turned to Young George and remarked—

"That boy is his mother all over again, and the little one won't be behind him; the old Thornborough blood, it does one good to see it."

"Got any more, Gideon?" they heard Sarah's clear little voice ask.

"Lots and lots. Hold on tight, Sarah, with one hand, and hold out your pinafore to me, and I'll lay them in."

Uncle and aunt closed their eyes. "Lord bring these dear little ones down in safety," Aunt Rachel was heard to murmur. Cautiously the boy stooped backwards and put something into the pinafore. Several times he repeated the action, then the anxious watchers below heard him say—

"Now go down three steps slowly, and

don't joggle your pinafore or you'll break them. I see another nest just below you."

Slowly the fat bare legs descended. Aunt Rachel gasped—

"She has got on her new strap shoes, and they are specially slippery."

"Hush!" whispered Uncle Dan again, but his own face was stern with anxiety.

"I see three more. Are you tired, Sarah?"

"No, I aren't tired ezackly, but the eggs is all running into each other."

"We'll go down and empty your pinny and come up again; go slowly, Sarah. I'll just stop and look in this last one."

Aunt Rachel watched the slow descent in an agony of impatience.

Neither of the children had perceived that they were being observed. As Sarah neared the earth they heard her saying to herself—

"Little blue eggs, Gideon will blow them; I shall have a necklace for me, and one for Queen Victoria. Little blue eggs all for me and Gideon."

The men were smiling at the child's

unconscious face as she kept stopping now to peep into her pinafore, now to look up at Gideon, who was beginning his own descent. As soon as she came within reach, Aunt Rachel darted forward, lifted her off the ladder, set her down sharply on the ground, and relieved her agony of apprehension by dealing a smart smack on her niece's bare neck. The startled child let fall the end of her pinafore, and the treasured blue eggs fell into a smashed heap on the ground. Gideon jumped to earth and faced his aunt.

"What do you slap her for?" he cried.

Sarah slipped her hand into his, but made no sign of anger or pain. Uncle Dan interposed.

"Children, you have broken the Sabbath day, frightened us very much, and robbed the happy birds of their eggs," he said gravely.

"Oh no, please," the boy answered eagerly. "We leave one in every nest, so as the mother bird won't mind. And I don't see why you were frightened, *we* weren't. And you ought to slap me too, Aunt Rachel."

"You might have both been killed," she remonstrated severely.

"Being killed would be *much* better than breaking the little blue eggs," bewailed Sarah.

Finding the terrors of death of no avail, Aunt Rachel urged—

"But what would Uncle Dan and I do without you children? Do not ever do it again. Promise."

But the culprits stood stubbornly hand in hand, and promised nothing.

Uncle Dan surveyed them. He was very susceptible to beauty in any form. It was an ever-increasing delight to him to see what fine and beautiful children these last Thornboroughs were. His sister would only allow that they were "well enough, beauty was but skin deep." But now it seemed to him that Jasper and Jael stood before him once more, and the years rolled back, and he himself was one of the daring trio who had crawled out through an attic window and all round the roof of Meads one moonlit night. How well he recalled

the thrashing their father had given him and Jasper, and Jael's wailing over the page of Romaine on "Faith," which to learn had been her share of punishment! And here stood their children before him, culprits awaiting doom, and looking upon him, perchance, as he remembered he and Jasper had looked upon their father—a tiresome old man not to understand the fun of an adventure, and a cruel man to thrash them for a mere joke. Uncle Dan sighed and blew his nose violently. Then he held out a hand to each. "Let us go in to tea," he said gravely. They loosed each other's hands and came to him.

"Have that ladder removed at once, Jacob; do not wait till to-morrow."

"Ay," returned Jacob Frant, as he watched his master and the children along the carriage-drive.

Miss Thornborough lingered a moment.

"Your master is too good for this world, Jacob. They ought to have been punished."

Jacob Frant looked at the still youthful face of his mistress.

“Do you mind the fair, forty-five years ago? You and Miss Jael wore white frocks then, like Sarah. You came and fetched me out of the hayloft.”

His sunburnt face was covered with a broad smile. Miss Thornborough smiled also.

“‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’ You had had your punishment, remember, Jacob. The tree cannot be bent when it is old. I trust that my blow may be blessed to little Sarah?”

“Maybe,” he replied. “I, like you, am over-ready with my hand in my own household, but ‘he that is soon angry dealeth foolishly.’”

“And ‘he that hateth reproof shall die,’ Jacob. No, Gideon has his mother’s sweet nature, though he be headstrong; but little Sarah has, I fear, much to learn yet—she has a stubborn will.”

Meanwhile uncle, nephew, and niece pursued their way indoors, through the cool stone hall, where the antlers and horns hung, and the great white owl and the spoonbill and the wood-pigeon looked stupidly down

from their cases. They entered the library, where, sinking into his armchair, Dan Thornborough asked—

“Which of you two children intend to speak first?”

Then, to his surprise, his niece flung herself into his arms in torrents of tears, wailing out—

“Oh, it was so nice up there, and I hate her for slapping me. I wish she was dead. I wish they was all dead except you and Gideon and me.”

Uncle Dan had no arguments; he had not the least idea what to do. Gideon stood staring, with his hands behind him.

“She’s quite right—it *was* nice up there. Couldn’t you punish me, uncle, without making me promise? Then we might go up again. I think you would like it too, if you could get so high.”

Uncle Dan wiped his niece’s sniffing little nose, and his own rumpled shirt-front, and while her sobs grew fewer, he remarked, as he smoothed her yellow hair—

“Get so high? Bless me, my boy, do

you suppose there is a brick or a slate on the whole of the Meads estate that I don't know? One would suppose that Meads was built for you and Sarah. Sarah's father and I—ay, and your mother too—have scrambled over the roof many a time. But do not go on the Sabbath, and do not take Sarah with you till she is bigger."

"Then I may go when I like?" cried the boy, eagerly.

"Yes; I went when I liked."

"I expect you were an awful swell at climbing, Uncle Dan; Jacob says you were. I should like to grow up like you, I think," remarked Gideon, admiringly.

"I'm only seven. Oh, when may I go with Gideon?" besought Sarah, with her arm round her uncle's neck.

"Sarah, do you know why your aunt slapped you?" he began gravely. "She was afraid you might fall right down off that ladder, and then she would have lost her little niece. She slapped you because you frightened her so. You should be sorry, not hate her."

"Well, I'll say my hymn to her at tea. Will that do?" asked Sarah, reluctantly.

"Yes, that will do."

"Oh, I hope she won't ask me to say 'The good girl.'"

"What is that?" said bewildered Uncle Dan.

"You tell him; I forget," commanded the child, pushing Gideon's arm.

"It's Miss Lydia Banks," explained Gideon. "Sarah doesn't like it, no more do I. The hymns are much nicer. I hate Miss Lydia Banks. She was a nasty little thing. I'm glad Sarah isn't like her."

"Well, tell me about it. Let me hear," said his uncle.

Then Gideon repeated, in a singsong voice, which made his uncle chuckle—

" 'Miss Lydia Banks, though very young,
Will never do what's rude or wrong;
When spoken to she always tries
To give the most polite replies.

" 'Observing what at school she's taught,
She turns her toes as children ought;
And when returned at night from school,
She never lolls on chair or stool.

“Some children, when they write, we know,
Their ink about them heedless throw ;
But she, though young, has learn'd to think
That clothes look spoil'd with spots of ink.

“Perhaps some little girl may ask,
If Lydia always learns her task ;
With pleasure I can answer this,
Because with truth I answer “yes.””

There, aren't hymns *much* better ?” demanded Gideon, triumphantly.

“Yes,” said Uncle Dan, with his whimsical smile. “Yes ; I can't say I admire the poem much.”

“There's Miss Lucy,” said Sarah, sniffing between each line. “Listen—

“Miss Lucy was a charming child,
She never said “I won't !”
If little Dick her playthings spoil'd,
She said “Pray, Dicky, don't.””

Gideon began eagerly to enlighten his uncle with more information—

“Of course he wasn't likely to stop spoiling them for *that*, was he, Uncle Dan ? Then there's Sammy Smith—

“Sammy Smith would drink and eat
From morning unto night ;
He fill'd his mouth so full of meat,
It was a shameful sight.’

Aunt Rachel would have sent him to bed. I wonder where he got the food? Mrs. Frant wouldn't have given it to him, horrid pig!"

By this time Sarah's tears were dried, and she clamoured for "a Sunday story."

"This is my birthday," cried Gideon, suddenly. "Tell us who was Gideon besides grandpapa. I've forgotten."

So Dan Thornborough proceeded to relate the history of that other Gideon who was not "grandpapa," partly in his own words, partly in the Bible words, while his listeners stared in his face with rapt attention.

"Stop a minute, say that again, uncle," interrupted his nephew.

"'The Lord be with thee, thou mighty man of valour,'" repeated Uncle Dan, patiently and impressively.

"Then he *was* going to be a soldier? I thought he was. Go on, uncle."

But when Dan Thornborough came to the words, "As thou art, so were they, each one resembled the children of a king," he paused.

Gideon had got up from the floor where he had been sprawling on his face, his chin supported in his two hands, and now stood erect before his uncle, his dark eyes flashing, his brown curls tossed over his forehead, his scarlet lips apart; one sunburnt little fist grasped the pillar of a carved whatnot, with the other he wielded his uncle's long ruler; his upright figure was full of command and enthusiasm. "Each one resembled the children of a king," thought Dan Thornborough, proudly. But then it suddenly flashed across him, "The lad must not be a soldier, or who will rule Meads when I am gone?"

"Go on, uncle dear," insisted Sarah, pulling at his coat.

"'And the country was in quietness forty years all the days of Gideon.' And that was quite the nicest time they had," finished up Uncle Dan, quickly.

"Ah!" cried his nephew, bringing down the ruler with a bang upon the leather seat of the chair near him. "Ah, I dare say it was, *after* the fighting."

"My lad, you will have to manage Meads when I am gone, you know."

"Where are you going?" cried the boy.

"When I am dead and gone, lad."

"What's that?" demanded Sarah.

"I'm going to be a soldier," persisted Gideon. "You know I am, uncle."

"I can take care of Meads, Uncle Dan," announced Sarah.

"Ah, my pink and white sugar-plum, if you take care of Meads, who is going to take care of you?"

"I myself, my own self, I can do it all," insisted the child, wriggling off her uncle's knees, and again pulling his coat gently. "Say I can. Say I may."

"Yes, and then when I come back I can help her, like the forty years' rest," cried Gideon.

"Here comes Susan to brush your hair for tea," answered Uncle Dan, with a sense of relief.

And Sarah was borne off, confidentially assuring Susan that she would take care of them all when Uncle Dan and Aunt

Rachel were gone away, and Gideon was fighting with lamps and pitchers.

That Sabbath evening, when his household was assembled for evening prayer, and Dan Thornborough, as was his custom, read instead of a sermon, passages from the writings of some divine, he chose "The Saint's Everlasting Rest," by Richard Baxter. He sat at one end of the long dining-table, his books before him, Aunt Rachel in the red leather armchair behind. Gideon and Sarah, on two small chairs on either side of their uncle, stared with the solemn, unabashed stare of childhood at the long row of servants seated opposite to them on the green baize-covered forms which the men brought in for the maids and for themselves.

Aunt Rachel had helped the children to such a plentiful supply of cake and cream at teatime that their small minds felt quite relieved from their feeling of disgrace, and a pleasant sense of forgiveness of sins pervaded them, and made them resolve to reward her by keeping awake all through prayers, instead

of dropping asleep as they often did. Perhaps this was the reason why, afterwards, Gideon Leigh often recollected with such a sense of peace that particular Sabbath evening, and why Sarah Thornborough, long years after, when her splendid youth, with its disdain of all control, was over, could never see "The Saint's Rest" without tears in her eyes.

There was only just light enough for Dan Thornborough to read by. The sky glowed golden behind the dark trees, a bat flapped in and out the ivy on the house. The gentle splash of the water falling from the basins of the fountain and the warbling of a benighted thrush, mingled with the finely modulated tones of Dan Thornborough's voice as he read—

"'Thou camest to spy out the land of promise; go not back without one cluster of grapes, to show thy brethren for their encouragement. Let them see that thou hast tasted of the wine, by the gladness of thy heart—that thou hast fed of the milk and honey, by the mildness of thy disposition and the sweetness of thy conversation.'"

And "the land of promise" brought a vision of happiness to each, though it meant something different to each of his listeners. To Gideon and Sarah the "land of promise" was the top field, where they had every intention of trying barebacked the new pony on the morrow, when Young George should be out of the way. Aunt Rachel's thoughts travelled back to the early grave of a certain Leigh, whose wife she might otherwise have been; and Susan Frant's thoughts travelled forward to one of the gardeners who had "spoken" to her that afternoon. None of them would ever willingly have missed those Sabbath evening services, for, as Mrs. Frant frequently declared, as she presided over the servants' supper-table, "It's like going into the promised land to hear the master read, and to see his face."

"Ay," Jacob Frant would reply. "He is not one to 'spare at the spigot and let out at the bung-hole.' He is diligent to know the state of his flocks, he looks well to his herds. 'He that watereth shall be

watered also himself.' But there will be none to come after him, except Sarah. 'Tis a pity she is a lass; a man-child would have been better. 'Unlucky is the house where the hen crows.'"

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Gideon Leigh was fifteen, his father and his uncle sent him to school. It came about on this wise.

Sir Godolphin Leigh, or "Uncle Dol," as his nephews and nieces always called him, rode over one winter day to have lunch with his brother-in-law, and to discuss the propriety of selling a house in the town, a small windfall left by a lately deceased relative to Gideon.

Uncle Dol was stout, and his laugh was loud and jolly. He had a habit, when thinking, of walking up and down, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and of saying "Eh?" very sharply, if he were interrupted. He had a great belief in his brother-in-law, though the two men were

so different. Dan Thornborough was a Tory, and was a man of few words; Sir Godolphin Leigh was a Whig, and voluble. Dan had kept up the excellent Thornborough library, was something of a classical scholar himself—knew the notes of many a singing bird, the history of the caddis-worms in the brook, and the haunts of the owl and the woodpecker. Sir Godolphin knew nothing about the few books at Leigh Court, and never bought one, was too impatient to watch either bird or animal, and prided himself upon knowing no language but his own. His horses and his dogs were his hobby, and even now, as he paced the hard gravel path, he was followed by an Ayrdale and a couple of Basset hounds. Both men wore gaiters and rough overcoats, but Dan Thornborough adhered to a stick-up collar and black silk scarf, tied in a bow in front, as in his father's day, while Sir Godolphin wore a modern stock and pin. Dan Thornborough's face was guiltless of all hair, save a small white whisker; Sir Godolphin wore a reddish beard, now turning grey, so his

rather clumsy mouth and jaw were hidden ; while his brother-in-law's fine, sensitive lips and strong chin were exposed.

Now, while they stopped for a moment at the iron gate leading out on to the frozen cart track, Uncle Dan's keen eyes fell upon the figures of a tall boy and a girl, slowly wending their way along it towards the iron gate. Uncle Dol's less long sight did not distinguish who they were.

"Well, that's settled. Now for some lunch before my ride back !" he cried jovially.

"Stop a bit, Dol," said Uncle Dan, in a puzzled voice ; "here come the children, and there seems to me to be something the matter."

Much the matter, apparently, for a more battered and deplorable boy and girl the two gentlemen had surely never beheld.

They came wearily forward. Gideon's face was covered with blood, one eye was shut up, his thick hair hung over his white face ; he was in his shirt-sleeves, which hung on him in ribbons, one arm hung listlessly at his side, the other was laid round his cousin's

neck ; upon her his whole weight seemed to rest as she dragged him onward. Sarah's, clothes were covered with dust, her hair hung over her face in straw-coloured, tangled curls ; she carried Gideon's jacket over her arm, and under it a crushed mass which seemed to be their two dusty, torn hats. Great scratches, as from angry fingers adorned her cheeks, but her eyes were flashing, her small nostrils quivering, as her eager voice made itself heard in hurried gasps—

“ Oh, Uncle Dan ! Gideon's fought ever such a big man. And the girl scratched me, because I wouldn't let her go at Gideon. Oh, he was making the girl carry a sack of coals, and she was crying, and so Gideon fought him, and when she saw him go down she was *ever* so angry.”

“ God bless my soul ! ” shouted Uncle Dol, roaring with laughter.

Uncle Dan opened the iron gate for the draggled pair.

“ He went down such a whack,” observed Gideon, faintly, as they slowly came through it.

“ Bravo, my boy,” cried his father, slapping

him on the back ; "and well done, Sally, to stand by and see fair play : it wasn't easy, judging by your face."

"She said I was a devil, and then she scratched me," announced his niece calmly. "I didn't care so long as I could keep her off Gideon. Oh, he was twice as big as us, Uncle Dan. Are you angry with us?" added the child, observing her uncle's face.

"No. But go in by the back door, you are enough to frighten your aunt, and get Mrs. Frant to doctor Gideon at once."

They began to obey, but before they had gone many yards, Gideon swayed and fell to the ground, dragging Sarah with him.

"Eh, what, is the boy down?" cried his father, as Dan Thornborough went after them and lifted Gideon up.

"Here, Dol, lend a hand ; the lad is played out, we must carry him in."

"Down, you brutes!" cried Sir Godolphin, jovially, as his dogs leaped around, adding to the excitement. "Here, Sally, carry our sticks, and run on and tell them we are coming."

Later on, during lunch, when Sarah had been sent to carry oranges to her hero, Dan Thornborough, who had spoken little during the meal, said suddenly—

“Dol, we must send Gideon to school.”

“My dear Dan, what should we do without him?” cried Aunt Rachel, setting down her wineglass in astonishment, without drinking.

“Eh? What, Dan? Send the boy to school? Why, God bless me, I thought you had taught him all you know by this time. And as for pluck, he has got pluck enough, surely?”

Dan Thornborough smiled, and cracked a walnut.

“Yes, he is plucky enough. Rather an inglorious war, though. That is the sixth row he has been in since midsummer. I begin to think he is aggressive.”

“You mean a Leigh is a Leigh, and a Thornborough a Thornborough, all about here. No one of his own standing to give him a thrashing, eh?”

“Something of the sort,” assented the other, peeling his walnut thoughtfully.

"Well, I am sure," observed Aunt Rachel, "it was very nice and brave of Gideon to take the part of that poor girl, but I confess I do not think it is good for Sarah to hear such bad language."

Uncle Dol burst out laughing. "What a little dare-devil she looked! Nothing will tame Sally. I've called Moll's" (Mary was the name of his second wife) "new chestnut after her, 'Sally the Dare-devil.'"

"Oh, Dol, I hope you will not talk so before the child. Sarah is over-difficult of control already."

"The child is only brave and strong," said Uncle Dan, quietly.

"Well, about this school business. What do I know about such things? Come in, Sally, and shut the door. Now stand straight here before me and tell me if you think Gideon ought to go to school."

"No," said the child, promptly; "we can't spare him."

"But he is growing up an ignorant lout, you see, Sally."

"Could I go with him, please?"

"No, you can't; you must stay at home here, and Aunt Rachel will show you how to darn stockings," answered Uncle Dol, teasingly.

"I know how already," said Sarah, with scorn. "What is a lout, please, Uncle Dan?"

Dan Thornborough surveyed his niece, and handed her half his peeled walnut.

"The catechism is your uncle's, Sarah. Go on answering him."

Instantly she turned again to Sir Godolphin.

"Well, go on asking, then," she ordered.

"What are Gideon's accomplishments?" began Uncle Dol, leaning one arm over the back of his chair and holding with his other hand the great silver mug which contained the remainder of his ale.

Rapidly his niece summed up her cousin's performances.

"Oh, he can nearly shear a sheep, and he can ride Uncle Dan's biggest horse, and on Sunday he drove them to church. Uncle Dan let him. And he mended our schoolroom

table, and Jacob says he can milk the cows quite well, and he took four swarms of bees his very own self this year, and never got stung, and I think that's all."

"And I suppose he can't read or write. Pray how do you suppose he is to get a living, if a great fire came and burnt up Meads and Leigh Court, and there were no more cows to milk, or bees to swarm, or coaches to drive? Eh, child?"

"Fires don't burn like *that*," declared Sarah, with the disdain of one who feels that their age unfortunately enables other people to treat them as idiots. "Besides, you *know* he can read and write, and do Jacob's accounts, and my French exercises; and we both know 'Lycidas' by heart, and all the meanings too. And he knows ever so much Latin. All about—

"‘Meanwhile Æneas steadfastly held in a middle course
with his fleet,
And cut the black waves with the north wind,
Looking back on the ramparts lighted up by the
flames of unhappy Elissa.’

That was Dido, you know; she was the

queen. I can't remember any more without the book. Uncle Dan said it wasn't a bad translation of ours to begin with. What do you think?"

"I don't think anything, and I don't know who Lycidas was, either," said Sir Godolphin, chuckling.

"Oh yes, of course you do," said Sarah, patronizingly. "He was Milton's friend. You know how it goes—

" 'Where were ye Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?
Ay me! I fondly dream
Had ye been there——'

Oh, there's a lot more. Then of course Gideon knows all about Buffon's 'Natural History' and all the different classes. I am just learning about the Annelida, the nice leeches, you know; their teeth are like saws, and they have a sucking disc which fixes itself on to you. They are very curious and interesting. Do you like leeches, Uncle Dol?"

Sir Godolphin roared with laughter.

"Now then, Dan, how dare you tell me

Gideon ought to go to school? I ought to send him to a desert island instead, so as to forget a little. To think I should live to be asked by a minx in a pinafore if I *like* leeches?" And Uncle Dol laughed till he had to wipe his eyes.

Sarah stood her ground. She shifted first on to one long leg and then on to the other, staring at her uncle with a kind of friendly wonder, not unmixed with contempt. She had dragged one of her long curls over her shoulder forward, and held the end in her mouth, munching it impatiently.

"Leave off wriggling, my dear, and put your hair back," admonished Aunt Rachel.

The child took no notice.

"*Sarah!*" said Uncle Dan, with emphasis.

His niece turned to him.

"What?" she said naughtily.

"Aunt Rachel made a remark to you just now. Oblige me by attending to it."

"Oh, sucking my hair. I always forget. There!" and she stood square before Sir Godolphin, clasping her hands behind her,

and looking straight at him, with her azure eyes.

Her very fair face, with its clean clear colouring and yellow hair, looked even fairer and cleaner than the long expanse of white pinafore which covered her. She was certainly the last child in all the country round to wear low frocks and short sleeves, and a less robust creature would have suffered from doing so, in such bitter weather. Her round firm arms looked mottled. Uncle Dol noticed it, and remarked—

“Why, child, my little maid hasn’t bare arms in this weather. Why don’t you cover her up, Rachel?”

“Don’t want covering up,” cried Sarah, wrapping her arms in her pinafore. “If Gideon is to go to school I’d rather go back to him now, please, Uncle Dol. We shall have such a lot to settle first. Can I go to a school too, till he comes back, Uncle Dan?”

“Why, Sarah?”

“Because I can’t stop here without him.”

“I shall have to stop here without him,” answered Uncle Dan.

“Don’t be childish, Sarah. Run away now and read to Gideon,” said Aunt Rachel.

But Sarah was looking at Uncle Dan’s face, and wondering at his smile, as his eyes continued to regard her. She came and stood beside his knee, and scanned his face eagerly.

“You are sorry too, I do believe. Why do you send him away?”

“To help him to grow up into a strong and wise man.”

“Shall you miss him as much as I shall?” she demanded.

“More, dear; much more.”

“Then I will stay with you and take care of you;” and she put her arm round his shoulder and leaned her head on his neck.

The long yellow curls touched Uncle Dan’s silver ones, and lay on his coat; the blue eyes stared across at Uncle Dol, who watched her curiously; the child’s fair hand lovingly stroked Uncle Dan’s tanned cheeks.

“I didn’t know before that you had quite such a compensation,” remarked Sir Godolphin, as, having drained the silver mug, he set it down with a bang on the table.

His brother-in-law smiled, and kissed the small hand which inadvertently Sarah passed across his lips, during her scanning of Uncle Dol.

"You can send him away when you like," she announced royally. "I shall take care of Uncle Dan till he comes back." Then she choked down a sob and rushed from the room.

Miss Thornborough had produced her knitting. She was accustomed to somewhat lengthy discussions whenever her brother-in-law came, and knew his habit of carrying them on over the luncheon-table. Her brother pushed his chair round, and sat staring into the fire.

Sir Godolphin got up and began striding about the room, his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes. He stopped opposite first one family portrait, then another; now examining old Jonathan Thornborough in scarlet coat and breeches, now that of the lovely but frail Diana, standing in a white satin dress on the terrace of Meads, her lace-ruffled hand on the head of her greyhound. He stopped long before the picture of his first

- wife, whose dark eyes laughed as merrily into his as they had done from the top of the Thornborough coach in years gone by. He sighed.

"God bless my soul, Dan, of course we must do our best for Jael's boy," he said at last, resuming his walk. "He is a Thornborough to the backbone; there is no Leigh blood in him."

Dan Thornborough looked amused. His long nervous hands rested on the arms of his chair; he turned his head leisurely, and surveyed his stout, choleric, jovial brother-in-law.

"Gideon cares little for books," he remarked.

"Eh? What? No; he's a Leigh there, that's true enough. Well, Rachel, what do you say to losing the lad?"

"Whatever you and Dan decide will be the best, I have no doubt. With Sarah, now, it would be different. Of course the deciding of her future will be my duty—a duty with which you and Dan will have but little to do."

"Heyday, Rachel, I expect you will find Dan has a great deal to do with it, when it comes to deciding anything for Sally."

"Oh, Dol, of course. Why, you know I consult Dan upon every point. I only mean that the *responsibility* will rest with me instead of with Dan, Sarah being a girl, you see."

"No, I confess I don't see; but it's all right if you do. Besides, the little maid's duty is clear enough—the boys to the horse, the girls to the spindle, is my maxim. By-the-by, Dan, what's all this about that other girl of poor Jasper's?"

"Mabel, you mean? Oh, she is going to be married, that is all."

"Who is the fellow?"

Miss Thornborough answered him.

"Oh, I can tell you all about it, Dol. It is to a gentleman of the name of Meakin. Percy Meakin is his name."

"Humph! and a mighty poor name it is. Is he a decent sort of fellow? Seen him?"

"Yes; he came here last week, and stayed the night, the day Gideon and Sarah were

over with you for the children's party, and Sarah tore her new frock, and Gideon put his little brothers up in the apple-tree, and——”

“There, there! Let the chicks alone, and go on about Meakin,” interrupted Sir Godolphin, impatiently.

“Oh, he was very well dressed, and gentlemanly, and very polite to me. He is in the Civil Service, I believe.”

“Any money, Dan?”

“His salary, and two or three hundred a year.”

“Rides?”

“Yes.”

“Come, that's hopeful. But stabling is expensive in town, for a man on short commons.”

“My dear Dan, he never mentioned a horse, except when he said he could not ride,” cried his sister, rubbing the side of her nose with her knitting-needle, with a puzzled air.

Dan Thornborough chuckled.

“Meakin hates dogs, and rides a bicycle,” he said quietly.

Sir Godolphin burst out laughing. He

laughed and wiped his eyes and laughed again, gasping at intervals.

"A Thornborough to marry a fellow who can't ride, and who is called Meakin! Oh Lord! oh Lord! But then it is only Mabel. Eh? What? Dare-devil Sally with such a brother-in-law! A little chap, I'll be bound, too. Eh?"

"Five foot nothing, sandy hair, and a diamond ring."

"He cannot help his size, Dan," remonstrated Aunt Rachel.

"True, most true," replied her brother with an air of conviction, stroking his chin; and, continuing to look at Sir Godolphin with his whimsical smile, he added, "Oh, it is all right; Meakin is not exactly our sort. But then, you know, no more is Mabel."

"Monstrous pity she went to her mother's relations—a bloodless fantastical set of town folk."

"Well, I don't know. The grandmother had a right to one of her grandchildren, I suppose. But it was just like poor Jasper to have chosen the right one to send to her;

Sarah would never have suited her." Dan Thornborough spoke with decision, as he carefully picked some long yellow hairs off his coat-sleeve.

"I suppose the fellow came up here to see what coin there was for Mabel, eh?"

"Yes. And oh, Dol, though she is not of age, Dan is going to——"

"There, there, Rachel, let the money be. Mabel is nineteen. I intend giving her five thousand pounds in addition to her own half; it is equivalent to Sarah's half of her father's money. Sarah will never want it. I wish Mabel to have all that was Jasper's. Sarah is mine," he added, half to himself.

Sir Godolphin Leigh halted in front of him.

"You mean——?" he asked.

"Who should have Meads when Rachel and I are gone, but Sarah?" said his brother-in-law. "Gideon must go to Leigh Court, I suppose."

"But Sally will marry, and the name of Thornborough has never failed in Meads yet!" exclaimed Sir Godolphin, helplessly.

"The man she marries must take her name, Dol ; I have thought it all out. Sarah will be what is commonly called 'a great catch,' but I think she has sufficient backbone to command the situation successfully and sensibly."

"God bless my soul !" ejaculated Uncle Dol, as he began his walk again.

He had never faced this question before. He had always vaguely imagined that somehow Gideon and Sarah would manage Meads between them, that he himself should outlive them all, but that if he did not, Gideon would also keep an eye on the Leigh Court estate. Facts began to settle themselves into some sort of order in his untidy mind, and it suddenly began to occur to him that if Gideon was to have a share in Meads and its income, he would have to marry Sarah Thornborough. And if so, in order that there might be still a Thornborough as master of Meads, there would have to be the name of Leigh lacking as master of Leigh Court, unless he left it to one of his younger sons. It was so very puzzling and bewildering that quite a long silence ensued,

and he paced the long dining-room many times. At last he said—

“’Tis a monstrous pity a girl should have the run of so much money and land. She may marry the first good-looking booby who asks her, and then—whew—away will go the land and the money.”

“That will not happen,” returned his brother-in-law, tranquilly.

“How the devil can you prevent it?” demanded Sir Godolphin, testily.

“I shall bring up Sarah so that she will not be likely to marry a booby.”

“That won’t help you. A man who would change his name for the sake of a maid can’t have much backbone. A fellow with any decent position or land of his own ought to want to keep his name on it.”

“Perhaps she will not marry a man with land, or position.”

Sir Godolphin stared.

“God bless my soul, Dan, you don’t mean to tell me that you hope Sally will marry a mere business man, or an out-at-elbows younger son, or a beggarly lawyer?”

“ My dear Dan, surely you expect Sarah to marry a gentleman ? ”

“ Most certainly I do, Rachel. But times are changed since we were young, when we thought nothing could be so fortunate as to join two estates by a marriage, and expected all our dependents to be proud to serve us, and eager to carry on our traditions. Why, only yesterday Ben came to tell me he thought of bringing up his eldest boy as an architect ; while Old George tells me his youngest hates the country, and wishes to study in order to be a doctor. And Gray intends to sell Gray’s Wick, I hear, as soon as he comes into the property ; he prefers his foreign Consulship, and Janions, the great confectioners, you know, are waiting to buy it.”

“ How dreadful ! ” exclaimed his sister.

Sir Godolphin Leigh grunted, and resumed his walk. Dan Thornborough smiled, and went on—

“ Thus you see that the future that lies before Sarah is different to that which lay before us half a century ago or more, and I must fit her for it.”

"How?" demanded his brother-in-law, halting in front of him, with his thumbs in his armholes and his legs well apart. "How? Eh?"

"I wish her to think for herself, to be more proud of supporting than of leaning, and not to be afraid of making decisions. I shall teach her to value people according to what they have achieved for themselves rather than according to what other people have achieved for them, and I wish her to value the affections as highly as the intellect. I intend to teach her all that Jacob Frant and I know about the management of the land and the farms. I will have no fool reigning here after me, be it man or maid. No, I believe Sarah will never marry a booby."

Miss Thornborough rolled up her work; she thought it time to change the conversation.

"Come, Dol, and let me show you what Dan is sending to Mabel," she cried.

"Eh? What? Presents? Well, with my consent, Dan, Sally shall never marry any fellow in business or connected with

trade. So now you know my mind on the matter." And Sir Godolphin, with a huge sigh of bewilderment, shook off his thoughts and followed his sister-in-law out of the room.

Dan Thornborough remained behind in his armchair, staring into the fire, a tolerant smile on his benevolent countenance.

On a side table in the oak-panelled, low-ceiled drawing-room a silver tea and coffee service was spread out, and beside it lay a large calf-bound Bible.

"Ah, very suitable, very solid and good; something for their babies to inherit. A fellow called Meakin isn't likely to leave them much else," chuckled Sir Godolphin.

"Halloa," he went on, as he opened the Bible at the first page and read, in his brother-in-law's clear, large writing: "To Mabel Thornborough on her wedding-day," followed by the date. "Halloa! oughtn't there to be a text or something in a family Bible?"

"That is just what I have been seeking to prevail upon him to put in," cried Miss Thornborough, triumphantly, "and I wanted

him to put 'on her marriage' instead of 'on her wedding-day.'"

"I do not know her well enough to put a text," objected her brother, who now entered, "but I do know her well enough to judge that it will be a wedding only. A marriage is a different thing altogether. Sarah's will be a marriage."

"Dear me, Dan, you have so many curious distinctions, it quite puzzles me. And as for Sarah, I fear very often you are but making a graven image of her, for which untoward love of the creature we must one day give an account, even though it be shown to a little orphan like Sarah."

"I shall be ready," said Uncle Dan, calmly.

"For what?" asked his sister, rubbing a mark of damp off the silver cream-jug.

But Sir Godolphin's jolly voice gave her the answer.

"Let be, Rachel, let be. He is always ready for things; he and the Almighty understand each other in the matter of Sally, ay, and of my lad too. You are monstrous

good to them yourself, you know. Come Dan, I may as well see the boy and tell him about this school business before I go."

Up to Gideon's bedroom they mounted. The low iron bedstead was tumbled, but no bruised hero lay on it; the pillow was missing, the window stood wide open, and snowflakes were drifting in on to the boards.

"Pretty draughty this, eh?" cried Sir Godolphin. "No pampering the lad up here. Where is he?"

"In the schoolroom, I expect," replied Dan Thornborough, stumbling over a book which had evidently fallen on to the floor from the bed. He picked it up.

"What's that?" demanded his companion.

"Hoyle's 'Games.' He must have got it out of the library. I haven't looked at it for years."

"God bless my soul, Dan, why that's the 'Treatise on Game Cocks' your father lent to mine when I was a little chap. Give it to me. Why, on page 460 there ought to be the 'Rules for Horse-racing' — 'To be observed by the owners and riders of all such Horses,

Mares, or Geldings, as shall run for His Majesty's Plates at NEWMARKET.' I remember the heading. Stop a bit, here it is," and Sir Godolphin began rapidly reading scraps from the pages, intermingled with exclamations and chuckles of delight. "Bless me, I learnt faro and hazard and brag out of this book ; the lad is a bit of a Leigh after all. Here's a bit of Sally's French exercise put in to mark the place in the 'Treatise on Game Cocks.' I'm sorry for that ; it's not fit reading for a maid."

"Nor for Gideon," put in Dan. "It was a brutal sport, degrading to train for, and disgusting to witness. 'Tis a pity that treatise is in the book at all."

Uncle Dol turned and descended the stairs, saying as he slipped the book into his pocket—

"Well, well, Dan, times are changed since those days, as you were saying. 'Rules observed at the Royal Cock-pit, Westminster.' Why, I used to know these rules by heart, and yet I never saw a cock-fight in my life. Monstrous queer how one learns with-

out a bit of trouble anything that happens to interest you, isn't it?"

Dan Thornborough laughed.

"Now you understand why Sarah knows so much about leeches," he said.

"Good thing too; if she is to grow up into a farmeress, she can't begin too soon. Halloa, Dan, there's nobody in here, and the fire is out. Where are they, do you suppose?"

Uncle Dan thought a moment, then led the way down the long passage back to the hall, where, reaching down his hat and coat, he remarked—

"Outside, I expect. Come across the yard with me."

So out across the yard in the bitter cold the two sturdy uncles stepped. The pump was encased in straw, the stables were closed, the light from the saddle-room fire danced on the window-pane. Old George sat within, reading his paper, Young George was leading out Sir Godolphin's horse.

"Quite right. Must be off in a quarter of an hour," he cried to the young man.

Through the yard and on to the crisp, frozen grass towards an old shed, Dan Thornborough led the way. It was used for miscellaneous articles such as were discarded by the house, the stable, or the garden. It was lighted by a few uneven panes of glass, roughly fitted into the woodwork, and incapable of being opened. Through these the two men looked into the interior. Strings of onions hung from the roof, old iron hoops, torn fruit-nettings, and mildewed stack-tarpaulins. On the floor were dilapidated garden-chairs, a broken wheelbarrow, stacks of flower-pots, part of a churn, and, immediately under the panes of glass, an old carpenter's bench. Upon this was spread out a map; the case lay face uppermost, immediately under Sir Godolphin's eyes. He read on a discoloured label, pasted on its pink marbled back, Bowles's "New Pocket Plan of London, for the year 1786." Growing accustomed gradually to the dark interior, the eyes of the uncles at last made out a sack of straw on the earthen floor, and lying upon it was Gideon, his head supported by a

bundle of pea-sticks on which was laid a pillow; he was covered by a blanket. Perched beside him, on an enormous inverted flower-pot, sat Sarah, with a long-discarded overcoat of her uncle's tied round her shoulders by the sleeves. The long body of the coat fell over the flower-pot to the ground behind her, giving her the appearance of some dwarf or gnome; her yellow head was the only bright thing in the dusty shed. She held a book in her hand, and was evidently reading to Gideon.

"What is it?" asked Sir Godolphin, in a loud whisper.

"'Idylls of the King,'" returned Dan Thornborough. "I know the binding. Queer idea to come out here, isn't it? I never disturb them. Jael and I used to go up into the corn-loft, I remember."

The two men stood watching them for some time. They were safe from discovery, for Gideon's head was bandaged and his eyes were shut.

"What's the map for, do you suppose? Not exactly the latest edition, is it?" asked

Uncle Dol, presently, as his eye fell upon "Hide Park," and the three bridges of London, "Black fryers," and Westminster, and the open fields of Southwark.

Uncle Dan rubbed his face thoughtfully, and replied—

"You told Sarah, you know, about Gideon going to school. I suppose school means London to her small mind. London is *terra incognita* to her, therefore she hunts up any map, date of no importance whatever. I take it that is what she has been doing, and they have come here to talk about it."

"Think so? Eh? Well then, leave them to it. Boy and girl will be man and maid soon enough, soon enough. Ride over with Gideon in a day or two, when his stiffness wears off, and we'll settle the matter together. Better than disturbing them now, eh?"

"Ay," replied Uncle Dan, with what was unusual for him, a sigh, as they turned away together. "Ay, much better, Dol."

Sir Godolphin glanced at his brother-in-

law, whose keen eyes were fixed upon an old nest swaying in the leafless branches of a tall elm. He was returning to a sprightly and healthy wife, and the laughter and pranks of his children; he looked forward to a hale old age at Leigh Court, cheered by sons and daughters and grandchildren. All the hopes for childless Dan Thornborough and for Meads were concentrated in one life—a girl's.

A gust of wind blew the crisp snow from off the shed into their faces, the boughs of the elm shook and bent and threatened to toss out the empty nest. Dan Thornborough had not spoken again, but Sir Godolphin, accustomed as he was to his frequent long silences, half expected some words to follow that almost solemn acquiescence, "Ay, much better, Dol."

Always impatient to throw off whatever saddened or annoyed him, he broke the silence by saying testily—

"Women have no logic and no judgment, or poor Dulcie would never have jilted you for that wine-sodden coxcomb. She might

have seen how he would turn out. Bless my soul, I see her now. What a pretty creature she was!"

A shadow flitted across Dan Thornborough's fine features; he withdrew his gaze from the elm branches and stood still and began feeling in his pockets. His brother-in-law waited, irritably scraping with his stick the snow from the gutter pipe on the end of the shed. Dan carefully searched his pocket-book, and finally handed a letter to him, saying shortly—

"Read that."

"Eh? What? God bless my soul, the fellow is dead, is he?" cried Sir Godolphin, in an astonished voice, when he had read the short letter. "Only last week, too," he added, turning it over to look at its date. "Poor girl, I wish it could have been t'other way round. Why, it must be five and twenty years ago since she died, and you have kept him in bread and cheese ever since that accident, haven't you?"

His brother-in-law slowly nodded his head in acquiescence.

"Pitiful scoundrel!" grunted Sir Godolphin; "white-livered coxcomb!"

"He had become a cripple, and she had loved him; let the dead rest," said Dan Thornborough, sternly, as he held out his hand for the letter, which his companion was impatiently crunching up in his fist.

"Monstrous good fellow you are!" grumbled Sir Godolphin, as he relinquished it. "Dead! So he really died at last. Poor Dulcie! And to think you never saw her again!"

"Once."

"Eh? What? You never told me?"

"No; I never told any one until now. You would have been the one I should have told had it been needful to mention it."

"Eh? What? Man alive, what a silent fellow you are! Well, I would cut my tongue out to keep any secret of yours."

"I know. Say no more about it. I have you and I have Sarah; also a share in Gideon. There is Rachel, too," he added.

"Rachel! Yes, of course, there is Rachel. And she is fond of every foot of Meads.

And as for Sally, when she says 'I believe in one God' I'll be bound she thinks in her heart—Uncle Dan."

Dan Thornborough smiled, a peculiar tender smile, which the mention of his niece always caused. He took his brother-in-law's arm, and they strode in silence through the yard and along the carriage-drive to the front door, where Young George was walking the horse up and down. Both uncles were thinking of Sarah.

CHAPTER III.

IN the following summer Mr. and Mrs. Meakin were invited to stay at Meads. The blue guest chamber was duly put in order for them, and Miss Thornborough trotted in and out half a dozen times on the day that they were expected, to see that her handmaidens carried out all her orders. Finally she called in her brother to see how well the new chintz, with the blue convolvulus pattern, matched the old wall-paper, with its pattern of blue vine leaves and straggling tendrils.

Dan Thornborough gave his sympathy patiently, as he looked at all that was required of him.

"It is well done, Rachel. Things are always comfortable in our house, thanks to you."

"Comfortable! Yes, Dan, but in truth I would like you to consider this more than *comfortable*. Mabel is a London young lady, you must recollect, and is accustomed to see the newest patterns and fashions."

"Then she will be glad to see old-fashioned ones for a change, I should think," returned her brother, smiling.

"I am not so sure, Dan. I think that, on the whole, people prefer what they are accustomed to; it saves them the trouble of having to cultivate an independent judgment."

"Perhaps. You are a shrewd woman, as I have often had occasion to remark to you," he said, putting his hand affectionately on her shoulder.

She beamed up in his face.

"I hope *we* shall not seem too old-fashioned to them; I should like Mabel to be fond of us," she said.

Keeping his hand on her shoulder, her brother drew her to the looking-glass, and tilted it to suit her small stature.

"Look! Can it be said that so dainty

a hostess is old-fashioned? Surely these silver curls and this lace head erection, and this shining gown, like a moonbeam, defy both time and fashion."

Miss Thornborough smiled at the fair old face in the glass, and replied—

"A well-favoured countenance is a gift from the Lord; and in truth I am glad I bought this silver-grey poplin instead of the blue one. But your words are pleasant to hear, Dan, though I would that you set less store by the outward appearance."

"Where is Sarah?" demanded her brother, who was accustomed to her admonishings on this subject.

"Being dressed by Susan, I trust," replied Miss Thornborough briskly, as she tilted the looking-glass back into position again, and smoothed the new chintz affectionately.

"I think not, for when I saw Gideon off with the phaeton, Sarah was flying up towards the top field, and I desired her to be here to welcome her sister."

"Susan!" called Miss Thornborough sharply, going out on to the landing.

Susan Frant, red-faced and out of breath, appeared at the door of her special domain, the work-room.

"Where is Miss Sarah?"

"On the haystack in the top field, reading. I told her the master expected her to be ready when Mrs. Meakin came, but she said she must finish a story about a young lady whose husband made her lead a lot of horses. I'm just going out after her again."

"No," commanded Dan Thornborough. "Go back to your sewing, Susan. If she is not ready she will explain to me the reason."

"But, Dan," objected his sister, while Susan seemed eager to remonstrate also; she could never see any fault in Sarah.

"She is reading 'Geraint and Enid,'" he said; "she will not stir till she has finished it. She will not be ready; she must give her own reasons for disobedience. Come, Rachel."

Reluctantly, Susan Frant returned to her sewing, and Miss Thornborough silently

followed her brother down the great stone staircase, and out on to the stone porch, where they sat down each in their special garden-chair, to watch for their niece and her husband.

Meanwhile in the top field Sarah lay on the haystack; the sun beat full upon her, except in the shaded hollow she had scooped in the hay for her book. Everything was still and silent around her; she had forgotten all about Susan Frant and her uncle's orders. Since Gideon had been at school she had taken more than ever to her books as her companions, and devoured them with a ceaseless avidity that astonished even her uncle. Much that she read she learned by heart unconsciously and without effort. Therefore having enviously seen Gideon start for the station driving the phaeton, she seized her book, and rushed away through the garden repeating to herself—

“O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,

By taking true for false, or false for true.
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen."

When she reached the haystack she climbed up on to it, and was soon wandering in that enchanted land she read about. Small wonder that an hour afterwards Susan, calling her from below, only received for answer—

"Oh, Susan, I say, just listen. He—

'bound the suits
Of armour on their horses, each on each,
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three
Together, and said to her'

(she was his wife, you know, such a nice girl),

' "Drive them on before you,"
And she drove them thro' the waste.'

Oh, I wish it had been me. I should like to have tried. What, Susan? Come in and be dressed. All right, presently. I shan't be long. Go away. Oh, do go, Susan, and don't bother."

So Susan Frant left her, knowing by

experience that if she "bothered" too much, she would not come at all. But the time went by, and happy little beetles crawled over Sarah's legs and hands, and lady-birds alighted on her book, and the clatter of pails from the cowshed began to be heard, and at last, when she had finished the closing lines, she dreamily began to look about her. Across the lower end of the field the cows were slowly wending their way to the milking-shed. There were the beautiful dun Alderneys, and spotted Strawberry her own especial pet, and the black-and-white Ayrshire who kicked over the pail unless her legs were fastened. Sarah thought she would go and have a glass of new milk; Ben, the cow-man, always kept the mug with the portrait of the Prince Consort on it on the ledge of the rafters. She scrambled down; the hay was sticking all over her hair, her cotton frock caught on the iron rail that separated the stacks from the rest of the field, a long tear resulted. "Bother!" ejaculated Sarah. Then she found she had left her hat on

the stack, and had to go back and fetch it; then she tore her pinafore on the same obnoxious railing, and again said "Bother!" and finally reached the cowshed just as the last cow was leisurely entering, meditatively swishing the flies off her back with her long tail. Sarah climbed on to the wooden gate and waited with her feet on the bar and her knees up to her chin. Ben was accustomed to her visits, and knew what she had come for. Like all the farm-people, he always called her "Missy," and as such he now addressed her as he reached up to the ledge for the "Prince Consort" mug and grunted out, "Milk, missy?"

"Yes, please; and oh, Ben, shall I read to you while you are milking? Could you hear, do you think, if I came and sat on the stool close to you?"

Ben grinned. "No, no, missy; this is a mucky place; we shall have Susan after us. Stay where you are."

"I don't care for Susan. I'm all torn already; look here;" and she spread out the rents for him to see.

But Ben had settled down to his work, and his head was already leaning against Strawberry's side; he did not look up. Sarah sat and watched him. There was a great walnut tree by the cowshed, its branches waved in the gentle wind; beneath it was a pool covered with green weed; flies were darting hither and thither over it; there were long black shadows on the grass from the tall elms.

"Haven't you done with Strawberry yet?" demanded Sarah at last, heaving a great impatient sigh. "I'm tired of waiting."

Ben took up the mug, milked it full, and held it out to her.

"Here you are, missy," he cried.

Sarah slid down off the gate and went and took the mug in both her hands. Her thoughts were still with her book. Slowly she drank, while the white froth spread round her red lips and over the tip of her nose. Her eyes looked over the top of the mug at Ben all the time she was drinking.

"More, please," she demanded when she had finished.

Ben slowly milked into the mug again, remarking—

“You must bring Miss Mabel as was to see the milking, missy.”

Down from her enchanted world fell Sarah Thornborough. Mabel was coming, and Uncle Dan had told her to be ready. Why, Susan had even been to fetch her, and she had sent her away hours and hours ago. What time was it? What was going on in the house? Had they arrived? Aunt Rachel would say she had been disobedient, and Uncle Dan would not say anything, which was much worse, and Gideon—well, Gideon would only laugh and say, “Books again, Sarah!” On the whole, Sarah thought she would rather not go into the house just yet. She thought she would not like to meet them all in that dirty torn frock. How horrid it was that Mabel was coming at all! Why need Gideon have gone to meet her? Everything was horrid.

“Here, missy,” cried Ben.

Sarah had got into that mood where people feel they may as well be hung for

a sheep as for a lamb. She pushed his large freckled hand away roughly. The mug he held out to her on his open palm that the handle might be free for her to take, was jerked to the ground and broken in half. Ben looked ruefully at the wasted milk.

"Why, *missy*!" he remarked with slow surprise, staring at her hot face.

"I don't want any more milk. I'm going to see Jacob. I shall have tea with him. They won't want me," declared Sarah, turning away. "I'm sorry the Prince Consort mug is broken, but it does not matter; nothing matters."

Ben went on with his work stolidly; he was not a moralist. Sarah pursued her way slowly across the sunny meadow, dragging her feet, and angrily switching off the tops of the tall daisies with the hat she held in her hand. Under a group of walnut trees near the barn in the next field stood two separate cottages in gardens. One was considerably larger than the other; it had a piece of kitchen-garden, and a row of beehives was set under the red-brick wall which divided it

from the field. All the rest of the garden was full of flowers in luxuriant trained confusion. Here were to be seen masses of mallow white and pink, blue love-in-a-mist, lupin, and larkspur; here were bushes of lavender, and roses red and white and yellow, patches of flaming poppies, and rows of sweet-peas and tall white lilies. Over the cottage climbed purple clematis and honeysuckle. Jacob Frant lived here alone; in the smaller cottage adjoining lived his married daughter, who saw to all that was necessary for his comfort. Many a time had Gideon and Sarah halted at his cottage in their wanderings in field and lane to discuss the bees, and examine the coops of young chickens, or carry the fluffy ducklings to the pond to see them start swimming.

Sarah Thornborough pushed open the gate and went into the garden slowly, kicking the stray pebbles out of her way up the box-edged path. She stopped in the open doorway and said, "Jacob, I'm come to tea with you."

The smoke from Jacob Frant's pipe could

not quite dispel the scents from the flower-laden air, but the parlour seemed close and dark to Sarah after the bright sun outside.

Jacob Frant, lean, brown, and observant, was sitting in his shirt-sleeves at the round table, studying a pamphlet on manures. He drew off his horn-rimmed spectacles and surveyed Sarah from under his bushy eyebrows as she stood inside the dark doorway with the sunny brilliant garden behind her. He carefully put a piece of twisted paper to mark his place, folded the pamphlet and put it on a shelf behind him, in company with his Bible and his account-book, laid his pipe on the edge of the mantelpiece between the white china dog and the orange-and-blue china shepherd, and, opening a cupboard in the wall, began to get out plates and cups. Sarah came in and sat down on the enormous chintz sofa which took up all one side of the room. Jacob Frant was even a more silent man than his master; it was one of his many maxims that "a fool is known by his much talking." Sarah generally chattered to him unceasingly, but to-day she seemed to

have nothing to say. The sharp bailiff was soon aware of it, but he said nothing till, having set the japanned tea-tray to his satisfaction, he pushed the table up to Sarah and said in his gruff voice—

“What’s amiss, child?”

“Nothing,” answered Sarah, airily, swinging her legs and drumming on the table.

“Well, well, ’tis ill ‘pouring water on a drowned mouse.’ Sit still while I step across to Polly with the teapot.”

“Let me take it,” cried Sarah, jumping up again; and, seizing the teapot, she held it open while Jacob shook in the tea from the canister painted with roses, which was the most beautiful of all his possessions in Sarah’s eyes. He and she never took out the tea with a teaspoon.

“Are we going to have jam?” she asked eagerly, as, teapot in hand, she watched Jacob fitting on the canister lid again.

“Black currant,” he answered, replacing the canister on the shelf.

Sarah went out with the teapot down the pebbly garden path, past the flowers and up

to the next cottage. Polly had seen her go into her father's, and stood waiting in her doorway, her baby in her arms.

"Well, missy, you want my hot water ; I thought you would. I'm right down surprised to see you come to tea with father to-day, and all so torn too. I thought you'd be with Miss Mabel, maybe."

"She had not come when I left the house," said Sarah stoutly. "I can hold baby while you fill the teapot ;" and she sat down on the grass and held out her arms.

Polly lowered the fat baby carefully into them.

"Mind his rattle, missy ; he's getting powerful strong. See he don't hit you with it."

The baby cheerfully banged Sarah on the head with the valued silver rattle, now battered and worn—a gift long years back from one of Sarah's ancestors to one of Polly's. Sarah jogged him up and down, and the banging went on till Polly came out again with the teapot wrapped up in a clean cloth.

"It's scalding hot, missy; mind how you take it. Oh, baby, naughty to knock missy like that."

"I don't mind," said Sarah; "it doesn't hurt. I like 'him;" and, relinquishing the baby to his delighted mother, she took up the swathed teapot and returned to Jacob's cottage.

He had not been idle. A huge plate of bread and jam stood opposite Sarah's plate, and a saucer of sage and mint leaves floating in water stood beside it. There was a bowl of honey in the comb, and milk in a white jug with a man's grinning face for a spout, and a boy escaping over a stile from an enraged bull depicted on its side.

But Sarah's heart was too heavy to rejoice in these her loved festivities, and she sat down on the sofa again without a word.

"Where's Gideon?" demanded Jacob, as he drew up his great wooden armchair to the table and took his seat.

"Gone to meet them."

Jacob knew who "them" meant, and he knew how much Sarah had missed Gideon.

“Well, never mind, child. Best speak out. There’s something more amiss than rents and crumples.”

“I hate her,” declared Sarah, savagely tearing a refractory crust from her slice of bread and jam.

“Heyday!” he cried.

“I wish I was dead,” she declared again.

“That’s a fool’s wish, and you are no fool. Do not anger the Lord,” he said gravely.

“What would He do to me?” demanded Sarah with interest.

“Take from you your many blessings, and set your feet in a hard way, perchance, child. ’Tis ill sitting in the dark; best speak out and come into the light again. What’s amiss, little one?”

But Sarah could find no words. She went on devouring with angry rapidity, and gulping down her miseries with the hot tea Jacob provided her with. The black-currant jam stained her lips and face, she had dropped it on her pinafore; she looked naughty and cross and miserable.

Jacob Frant spread himself a thick sandwich of bread and butter, laying a layer of mint leaves in between. He took a long time over it, and there was silence in the cottage. Bees buzzed in and out of the open door and lattice windows; a wasp hovered over the honey; Grip, Jacob's great dog, lay across the doorway winking at the flies.

"The way to Babylon will never bring you to Jerusalem," remarked Jacob at last.

"Who wants to go to Jerusalem? And I don't see why you talk about Babylon, Jacob."

"I expect you've done something wrong, child, and instead of undoing it you only sit there wishing you were dead."

Sarah was far too quick a child not to see the application; also she had been accustomed all her life to Jacob's way of putting things. She made no answer, but held out her cup for some more tea, saying affably—

"I'm glad I've got the cup with the forget-me-nots on it. It was your wife's, wasn't it, Jacob?"

“Ay,” he replied.

He was in many ways like Dan Thornborough, having for years looked upon him as his model.

“You often say ‘ay,’ just like Uncle Dan, but yet you aren’t like him in everything, Jacob. He never has his meals in his shirt-sleeves. I wish he did, and I wish Aunt Rachel wore a sun-bonnet like Polly, and I wish it didn’t matter that my frock is all torn, and—well, what do you look at me so for, pray?”

“A horse is neither better nor worse for his trappings. I see you’ve been a naughty maid, and you wish we were all like you. You’ve a mind that it is more comfortable to be dirty than clean. Give over hiding it up, child, or it will be a thorn in your flesh.”

Sarah tossed her head. “I don’t care,” she said recklessly.

“Perhaps the master does; ’tis ill angering him, though he says naught,” observed Jacob, taking out his large silver watch and looking at it reflectively.

Sarah was silent; she suddenly evinced

deep interest in melting a lump of sugar in some hot tea in her spoon.

Jacob Frant saw his advantage, and went on, as he slowly polished the case of his watch with the palm of his hand—

“The day will come as a thief in the night when the Lord will say to the master, ‘Well done, thou faithful servant ;’ and lo, we shall look for him and shall not find him, and his place will know him no more.”

Sarah’s eyes blazed ; she threw down her spoon with a clatter, spilling the melted lump on the cloth.

“How *dare* you, Jacob ? I know what you mean. You think that when he is dead I shall be sorry to have vexed Uncle Dan. Just as if I’m not miserable enough now while he’s alive. Why, I *couldn’t* be more miserable than I am now. I shan’t ever be happy any more. I should like to die now, directly, and be buried here in your garden.”

“Come, my dear, it’s not so bad as that. Confess your fault, and the Lord will pardon you.”

“I don’t care for the Lord. It’s Uncle

Dan. Here, take the horrid book and burn it ; it's all through that. I shan't ever read it any more."

And Sarah produced the cherished "Idylls" from beneath her pinafore and thrust it into Jacob's hand, who took it, puzzled at the tearless storm he had raised. He put it up on the shelf with his papers and account-books, saying as he glanced out of the window—

"Here they all come."

"Who?" cried Sarah, jumping up and peeping under his arm.

"Yon. Do you see, child? The master, and Miss Mabel with the parasol, and Gideon, and the little chap with the glass in his eye will be Mr. Meakin, walking with Miss Rachel."

"Are they coming here?" gasped Sarah.

"Ay. Move, child; I must put on my coat;" and Jacob proceeded to take it down from a nail behind the door.

Sarah turned from red to white and to red again, but she stood her ground with her hands clasped behind her.

"It's like the Judgment Day, Jacob," she said under her breath; "they'll all know now, won't they?"

He surveyed her with grim and proud approval.

"Ay, child. That which is said in the ear will be heard on the housetops. 'Most things have two handles, and a wise man takes hold of the best.' There's the back door and they won't see you; will you go or stay?"

"I shall stay," she answered, going and standing behind Jacob's wooden armchair.

He made a step forward and laid his knotted hand on her bright rough head. "The Lord be with thee," he said tenderly, and then voices began to be heard as the party entered his garden.

"Jacob! Jacob Frant, I have brought my husband to see you. Do you remember me?" cried the clear sweet voice of the Thornboroughs, and Jacob went out of his dark parlour into the sunshine to receive Mabel Meakin. She was a slim dark girl of middle height. She was dressed very fashion-

ably, and her clothes looked as though they had been moulded on to her. She had a languid way of looking round for help, which apparently she generally obtained, for Gideon Leigh stood close by her, holding a gold scent-bottle, a fan, and a scarlet parasol with a heavy embossed silver handle. He had shot up into a well-groomed and beautiful youth. The three years he had in advance of Sarah made a perceptible difference now, for she still remained an untidy child.

"Halloa!" he cried, catching sight of her where she stood holding on to the wooden chair with one hand, and dragging a long curl of hair between her teeth with the other. Everybody knew this habit of Sarah's when she was excited or naughty. Sir Godolphin Leigh encouraged it; it made "Sally look more dare-devil than ever," he declared. Aunt Rachel, as has been seen, waged constant war against it, but so far with but poor success.

"Halloa, my cherub, so here you are. Come and speak to Mabel; she is awfully keen on knowing you."

Sarah did not move ; her eyes were riveted on Dan Thornborough, who stood just outside the door talking to Percy Meakin. Gideon saw there was something wrong ; somehow Sarah looked rather in a mess, he thought. Mrs. Meakin had followed him in. She came up to Sarah and took her by both hands and kissed her.

"Oh, Sarah dear, how glad I am to see you ! How you are grown ! You were only a little scrap of a thing when I saw you last. Come and sit down on the sofa here beside me. My fan, please, Gideon ; it really is very warm ;" and she leant back against the sofa pillows and drew her little sister down beside her.

Gideon bent over her and fanned her with a courteous gallantry that was new to Sarah.

"So you have been having tea here with Jacob Frant, have you ? What a mess you are in, dear. But what lovely looking jam ! No wonder its attractions were stronger than the desire to see me."

"It wasn't *jam* that made me forget," cried Sarah, scornfully.

"Wasn't it, dear? Well, never mind. That will do, Gideon, thanks. Give me that footstool, will you. What a queer little room this is! I wonder if Jacob would sell us that corner-cupboard. I must tell Percy to ask him. I tried everywhere for one in no end of old furniture shops. You shall come and see my house, Sarah."

"If Gideon comes too," said the child, beginning to be attracted by the perfume from the fan, and the rustle of the dress and the bewildering number of her sister's movements.

"Ah, stick to the old love, quite right. Oh, Percy, you've done talking at last. Here is Sarah. Country manners and dress, you see."

"The genuine article," he answered.

Sarah scented a slight in the smile that passed between husband and wife. She was up in arms directly, as Percy Meakin came towards her and held out his hand, saying carelessly—

"How d'y' do?"

"I am quite well, thank you. And please

I wish to say that it is not Aunt Rachel's fault that I am all torn and dirty and wasn't at the front door when you came. I was told to, and I read on the top of the haystack instead. And Susan came to fetch me, and I wouldn't go. And there's my white silk frock and sash on my bed, ready for me to put on, and you can go and look at it, if you don't believe me, and take *him* too," and she pointed at Percy Meakin.

"What a coil about nothing. I dare say you look very nice in the white frock, little girl. True daughter of Eve, isn't she, Mabel?"

Then Gideon interposed, laughing—

"Sarah thinks your remark about country dress and manners is a reflection upon my uncle and aunt," he explained.

Sarah did not thank him. She was watching her uncle's back, and wondering that he did not turn round. He *must* have heard her confession.

"Oh, I see," said Mabel, yawning and getting up. "Well, if I were you, Sarah dear, I wouldn't get into a temper about nothing. Come up to my room when you

are dressed, and I'll show you all my jewellery. What nice hair you've got, dear! Hasn't she, Percy? One kiss. There, now we must be going. Percy, I hope you have been talking to Jacob Frant. He is a most intelligent man for his station, and always expects to be taken notice of, I believe. Come, Gideon."

Percy Meakin turned to Sarah.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked.

She shook her head violently.

"Well, then, we must hope to be better acquainted at breakfast, I suppose."

Sarah stared at him, and then Miss Thornborough, who had stayed at Polly's cottage to give orders about some work she was doing for her, came bustling in.

"My dear Sarah, I hope you have apologized to your sister and your new brother for being absent on their arrival. Little girls should never forget their manners."

But Sarah was past speaking. She had painfully delivered her testimony, and they had only thought she was in a temper, and cared about jam, and had made a fuss about

nothing. And all the time Uncle Dan had not taken the least notice of her, but stayed outside talking to Jacob.

"You do not look quite the thing; you have eaten too much tea, I fear, child. Well, there, never mind, I do not wish to make you cry. You forgot your uncle's orders and are doubtless sorry. We will say no more about it. Shall we go, Mr. Meakin?"

He followed the dainty figure, put up her large blue sunshade for her, and Sarah saw them pass the window behind her sister and Gideon. She stood quite still in a whirl of passionate anger and rebellion. She choked back the long pent-up sobs that were rising in her throat, and furiously rubbed away the tears that were filling her eyes. Nobody should see her cry.

Uncle Dan remained in the garden. He had moved from the porch where he had stood most of the time, and was now standing on the path with his back to the door, giving some directions to Jacob Frant. Sarah saw him, with his stick tucked under his arm, writing on a leaf of his notebook.

She stalked to the window and put her head out. He would be obliged to pass it in going to the gate; if he did not look back at her then, she should know that he was very angry, or, worse still, had perhaps forgotten all about her. She tore off the leaves of honeysuckle and the clematis flowers, in her rage, and threw them out on to the garden path. The murmuring of the men's voices stopped. Sarah hung further out of the window and waited breathlessly, tearing off the leaves faster and faster.

Presently she felt a touch on her shoulder, and wriggled herself back into the room and faced her uncle.

"Come, Sarah, we will walk home together," he said, holding out his hand.

Then Sarah's anger was stilled, and the awful load lifted from her heart.

"Oh, Uncle Dan, I'm sorry," she wailed, as, clutching his arm and laying her head against it, she gave one great sob.

He picked up her hat, tied it carefully on for her, put his arm round her, and said as they went to the door together—

"Leave off crying ; it is all over. Did you think I had forgotten you ? It would not have been strange if I had, for you forgot me, you know."

Sarah looked up in his face, and met the whimsical smile she knew so well, and was comforted. Out into the bright garden they came, where Jacob stood holding open the gate. He waved his hand towards his flowers.

"Do you want to die and be buried there, now directly, child ?" he asked gravely.

But Sarah, feeling her uncle's arm tighten round her, leaned closer to him and shook her head, but did not answer.

"A wild goose never laid a tame egg," said Jacob to his master, nodding at Sarah.

Dan Thornborough smiled and replied—

"Ay, a bird of the old flock. Good night, Jacob."

Sarah wondered what they meant, but was too happy to trouble to ask.

The next morning the Meakins were agreeably surprised at the fair fresh edition

of Sarah that made its appearance at prayers, affably smiling, with her beautiful hair shining like spun gold over her clean frock. She took her place at breakfast beside her aunt, and slowly discussed her plate of porridge in silence, staring the while at her new relation, who was keeping up a running fire of talk with Gideon about the places abroad he and Mabel had just come from.

Presently he remarked—

“Well, you can take my word for it, there is no change so complete, and no rest so thorough, for a hard-worked man, as a few weeks abroad. I don’t know anything of England myself, and don’t wish to, but I flatter myself I am a pretty good guide-book for anybody who wants to go to the places abroad that I have been to.”

Sarah paused, holding a spoonful of porridge halfway between her plate and her mouth. Percy Meakin began to appear in quite an interesting light to her, she stared thoughtfully at him, saying dreamily, “*I* should like to go abroad too.”

“Should you?” he asked good-naturedly.

"Well, perhaps some day your uncle will let you come with us, if you ask him."

"And Gideon too?"

There was a laugh round the table.

"Gideon too, of course, if he wants to come, but I dare say he will have been half a dozen times before you are grown-up," answered Percy Meakin.

"Can't you wait for me?" asked the child, entreatingly.

"Oh yes, I dare say, Sarah. But look here, I expect you will want to go to a different place to what I do. That will be jolly awkward, won't it?"

"I wish to go to Iceland and Timnath, and to Paris and to Bethlehem," announced Sarah, with decision.

Dan Thornborough spoke for the first time in the discussion, for a chorus of laughter followed, and the red colour had mounted over Sarah's clear brow.

"Let me hear your reasons, Sarah," he said gently.

She turned eagerly to him.

"Why, uncle dear, you told us about the

great high-spouting springs, you know, all hot, in Iceland; then I should like to see where Samson killed the lion all by himself; and then there was the French Revolution; and then—oh then, of course, you all want to see Bethlehem yourselves,” she ended, looking triumphantly round the table.

“What a queer child!” said Percy Meakin to his wife, in an undertone.

“What a large order, isn’t it, Aunt Rachel?” asked Gideon.

“Yes, dear,” said Uncle Dan, quietly; “those are very interesting places, but when you go with Mabel and Percy I think you must let them choose, as they have been abroad so often, they know more about it than you and I do.”

Afterwards, while sauntering round the garden, Mabel Meakin observed to her uncle, “Sarah ought to be with other children; it is bad for a child always to be with grown-up people.”

A pang shot through Dan Thornborough’s heart that he might not, after all, be doing the best for his darling.

"You think so?" he said anxiously.

"I am sure of it. Couldn't she go to school?"

"No, certainly not," he cried emphatically.

"Ah, well, perhaps not right away from here. But isn't there any place she could ride over to in the town, and be fetched back in the afternoon?"

"I must see," he replied, "there may be merits in the proposition; you have lived more among children, Mabel. I suppose they like each other's society?"

"Why, of course," she answered cheerfully; "we look quite old fogies to them. Sarah takes things too much to heart. I'll drive over to the town with Aunt Rachel and look round if you like, and we will go and ask the Howards. It would be a pity for Sarah to grow up different from other people, wouldn't it?"

There was a twinkle in Dan Thornborough's eyes as he picked a crimson rose from the bush they were passing, and presented it to his niece with the grand courtesy which had made Percy Meakin confide to

his wife the night before, that "Your uncle is a fine old bird."

"Sweets to the sweet, niece," he said. "I desire that Sarah should miss none of the happinesses that should pertain to her youth. So, if children's companionship be best for her, as I doubt not is true, she shall have it. I am obliged to you for the suggestion."

"Oh," said Mabel, looking gratified, "I'm sure you and Aunt Rachel have done everything that is right and good for her. I only hope she is grateful."

"No," he said, as he drew a garden-chair on to the gravel for her. "No, I am thankful to say that I believe it never enters Sarah's head to be grateful."

She stared at him. "How very odd!" she said.

PART II.

THE HAYS OF BYRON VILLA.

“We cannot kindle when we will
The fire which in the heart resides ;
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides.
But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

“With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone ;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.
Not till the hours of light return,
All we have built, do we discern.”

CHAPTER I.

BYRON VILLA stood in a long road with semi-detached villas on either side. These had little front gardens separated from the road by a low iron railing, and little back gardens separated from the railway by high wooden fencing. Young sycamores, straggling chestnuts, and bushes of arbutus helped to fill up the bareness at the front, while the back gardens were generally planted with potatoes and artichokes and a few patches of sweet peas. It was a very neat road, and all the people who lived in it were neat, kindly, and very respectable. They were almost all of the same social position; the two great exceptions were the family who lived at "Glengowry" (these washed at home, and hung their linen out in the

back garden) and the family at "Chandernagore" (these had asphalted their back garden from fence to fence, their many children kept rabbits, and there was always a puppy who squealed, and a baby who cried). But then it was always hoped that the "people" from "Glengowry" and "Chandernagore" would move soon, and meanwhile nobody visited them. There were several widows in the road, several maiden ladies, and a few young married couples. The men went into London every day from the new little suburban station close by, and the women occupied their days in keeping house, calling on each other's "At Home" days, making their clothes, or visiting the poor, according to their several bents.

Every one kept a servant. It was a point of honour among the ladies not to go to each other's houses on any pretext whatever till a reasonable time after lunch, so that the servant should have had time "to dress;" if at this hour she opened the door in her cotton dress, that household was kindly but firmly spoken of as "badly managed."

Byron Villa was exactly like all the other houses in the road, but the few yards at the back were sown with grass seed, and used as a tennis lawn. Here, every Saturday afternoon during the summer, certain youths in shirt sleeves, and maidens in discarded "best" skirts, and blouses more or less badly fitting, amused themselves happily together, as youths and maidens have done, and will continue to do, in spite of small means, shabby clothing, and no possible provision for the future.

The maidens were Ada, Augusta, and Jessie Hay; the youths were their only brother, Edward, and Tom King, son of the doctor in the next road. Sometimes Herbert Moore, the Vicar's only son, and Flora Moore, the Vicar's only daughter, came, but that was when they happened to know that Edward and Augusta Hay were at home.

Mrs. Hay, placid, stout, and comely, would sit just inside the window of the twelve-foot square drawing-room watching the party, a perennial smile on her simple countenance,

knitting socks for her son, or making lace trimming for her daughters, happy in the conviction that there never had been such dutiful, attractive, and beautiful children as her own.

The good-natured, untidy servant would bring out a tray of glasses, containing the lemonade the Hay girls had made in the morning, and set it down on the wooden bench for the thirsty players. "Afternoon tea" was done away with on Saturdays; the whole party sat down to a tea-supper, at half-past seven, of cold meat, water-cress, jam tartlets, and hot tea-cakes.

Mrs. Hay was a widow. Her husband had been vicar of a country parish; they had lived in a roomy, rambling old house, with garden, paddock, tennis lawn, and stable.

The girls were strong, noisy creatures, without a talent of any sort except that of amusing themselves, and without a taste, except that for good-natured gossip, perpetual parties, and perpetual changes of raiment. Edward Hay was only like his sisters in so far that he was strong and well-grown.

All the time that had not been used in riding to and from school in the neighbouring town, he had spent with his father, either among his books in the study or walking with him through field and lane on his parish visits. Mr. Hay had for years been engaged upon a history of the families in his county, and, as soon almost as he could read, his son had shared his work.

There was not a brass or a monument or a parish register in the county that was unknown to father and son. The boy taught himself to illuminate, to draw coats of arms. He would stay in the town an hour after school to learn bookbinding in a musty shed in a close, back street. He bound roughly, but with astonishing ease, his father's sheets and his own beautiful drawings, copying out in his clerkly hand all the blotted or crabbedly written ones.

Edward Hay was destined for the University and the Church, but when he was sixteen his father died, and his mother's only brother offered him a clerkship in his flourishing business in London.

Mrs. Hay came up to town, and by the advice of her rich and bustling sister-in-law explored the little suburb, and a year after her husband's death settled down in Byron Villa. Neither she nor her daughters greatly regretted the old home; they were tired of the large, half-empty country church, with its rustic congregation, the stillness of lanes and fields, the difficulty of visiting their scattered neighbours. The sight of roads full of neat villas, and the possibility of attending at least three different churches on a Sunday, promised them infinite variety; and the girls felt there was indeed something to live for, when they heard of weekly teas on the cricket-field, amateur concerts at the Town Hall, and working-parties for various charities.

It was now seven years since they had settled down in Byron Villa, and all that time Edward Hay had lived his solitary life, going up to town at eight o'clock, returning between six and seven in the evening, and between two and three o'clock on Saturdays.

The steady, heavy-looking boy had grown into a handsome, somewhat silent man, tolerant of the life he had to lead, affectionate to his mother, indulgent to his sisters.

One determination, of which he never spoke, but which guided all his actions, was that he did not intend to be all his life a paid clerk, and live in suburbs. He had nobody to advise him, his colleagues had no standards beyond the very one he was struggling against, and the family friends at home had little sympathy with ideals.

If there was any cloud upon the calm in which Mrs. Hay moved, a calm that even her husband's death had only very temporarily broken, it was that Jessie, her youngest born, had of late shown a tendency to discontent, and an aptitude for making curious remarks which Mrs. Hay could not understand.

Jessie Hay was in this mood now, as she sat on the window-ledge of the front sitting-room, staring across the parched plot of grass into the road.

"Don't lean against the curtains, Jessie

love ; you will tear them off their hooks," said her mother.

"Why do we have curtains ? People can't see in. I only wish they could!" returned Jessie, dreamily.

"Thank Heaven they can't!" cried Augusta, briskly, "just when I'm trying on this new blouse."

"Well, you look very nice in it. As your hair is inclined to be red, I am glad you had the sense to make a blue one, instead of a pink one, like Ada's. Oh, Ada, don't put those red flowers in my hat!"

Ada, with her mouth full of pins, turned the hat, with an energetic twist, towards Mrs. Hay. "Look, mother !" she cried.

"I like red, Jessie love ; against your dark hair it will look very nice. But, now you are eighteen, you should be able to trim your own hats, you know."

"I don't like trimming hats, mother ; and Ada does them so beautifully. I like——"

"Sitting in the infirmary all day, and hearing about the cases," interrupted Augusta ; "and yet, you know, you aren't

a bit more sorry for the poor things than I am, or Ada, or mother ! ”

“ I don’t think being sorry has anything to do with it ; it is all so curious, that is why I go.”

“ Well, don’t you come near me if I am ever ill, Jess. I dare say I’m as curious as most people, but I’d rather be looked after by somebody who was sorry for me,” cried Augusta, in her clear, jolly voice.

“ There goes the two-thirty ; Edward will be in directly,” said Mrs Hay, when the puffing of an engine drowned for some moments all conversation.

“ I wish there would be an accident,” remarked Jessie, reflectively.

“ Horrid child ! ” cried both her sisters.

“ I don’t want any one to be killed, but I should like just to *see* an accident,” persisted Jessie.

“ Well, if you serve to Tom as you did last Saturday, I dare say you’ll see an accident,” declared Augusta, with conviction.

Jessie pouted, and said—

“ Tom should not play tennis ; he is too short-sighted, isn’t he, Ada ? ”

"Oh, I don't know. There, I've finished this hat at last. Put it on, Jess. No, not like that ; let me do it. There, child. Look, mother."

Mrs. Hay looked obediently, but it was at the placid, large-framed Ada, whose imperturbable good temper was so like her own. She was the eldest of the family, and they all regarded her as a model of good sense. Jessie remained sitting on the window-ledge, her curly head bent for her sister to arrange the hat.

"I know somebody who will think you have trimmed that hat beautifully, Ada dear," said Mrs. Hay, with a knowing smile.

"Tom King,
Bring the ring,
All on a summer morning,"

sang Augusta, as she arranged her fringe carefully under her straw hat in front of the chimney-glass.

"Shut up, Gus," cried Ada, good-humouredly. "It is Jessie Tom comes after, not me."

"He laughs with Jessie, but he admires

you most, Ada. He said the other day that you were the finest girl he knew, and took the cake for good nature."

Ada Hay laughed her slow, comfortable laugh, and turned the tables on her sister by saying—

"Is Herbert Moore coming this afternoon, Gus?"

"Have not the slightest idea, my child. Flora won't, of course. She freckles so in the sun, and she is not so keen on tennis as I am."

"One each," remarked Jessie, irrelevantly.

"One what?" cried Augusta, sitting down on the arm of her mother's chair, and beginning to undo a paper parcel.

"One, other half; you and Herbert, and Tom and Ada, and Flora for Edward. I think, mother, *I* should like to go away and earn some money."

"Well, dear, do, if you like."

"Gracious, Jess, what's the matter with you this afternoon?" cried Augusta, triumphantly drawing from the parcel, and holding up, a cardboard picture of a white swan

sailing upon a pond overshadowed with green grasses ; a blue dragon-fly and a green beetle hovered above the swan, and a border of gilt paper enclosed the picture. "There !" she exclaimed, "don't talk about earning money, but look at *that* !"

"Lovely !" declared Ada, rapturously.

"What is it for, dear ?" asked Mrs. Hay.

"For the fireplace in the drawing-room. I bought it at the post-office, and these two Japanese fans, just to brighten us up a bit."

"Sweet," said Ada again.

"How very nice, dear ; just what I always wanted your dear father to have, but he never would let me buy them."

"I think, mother, I should like to give out the tickets at a booking-office," began Jessie, ignoring the new fire ornament.

"It would be very draughty, dear ; you would always be having toothache."

"Besides, suppose a drunken man came and asked for a ticket, whatever would you do *then* ?" asked Ada, as she put pins and cottons away in her rosewood workbox."

"Give it him, of course."

"Suppose it was the race time?"

"It would be very interesting. I should see such lots of people," persisted Jessie.

"Oh, Jessie, what a little goose you are! You know you can't be a railway clerk; what's the good of bothering about it?" cried Augusta, putting straight her mother's cap bow.

Jessie turned her head and looked out of the window.

"I shall talk to Edward about it," she said calmly.

"Oh yes, of course, he'll know," cried Augusta; "men always know those sort of things. I say, Ada, I am afraid we can't go out till it's cooler, can we?"

"Well, I don't know, let's see; there is a little shade on the gravel path by the water-butt, but there is only room for three, the rest must sit inside on the window-ledge," declared Ada, yawning and stretching her fine arms over her head.

"Here comes Edward," announced Jessie, peering out down the road.

"Dear boy. It is really terrible to be obliged to wear a silk hat in this weather," said Mrs. Hay. "Just call to the girl to bring in his dinner, Ada."

"If I were Edward I would have my dinner in town on Saturdays," declared Augusta.

"He gets it for nothing here."

"Now, Jessie, that's a beastly shame of you; you know there is not a grain of meanness in Edward."

"I merely stated a fact," returned Jessie, coolly.

"It was the nasty tone in your voice. People can make quite a simple thing sound nasty or nice; can't they, mother?"

"There, there, girls, don't quarrel. Jessie love, I am afraid you are not well. Ah, here comes my dear, tired lad."

Edward Hay came into the hot little room, kissed his mother, and sat down on the nearest vacant seat, which happened to be the music-stool. There was a red rim all across his forehead where his hat had rested, and distinct signs of coal-dust remained

round his eyes, his thick brown hair lay moist on his brow, his coat was dusty. Glancing round, his dark eyes fell upon Augusta's purchase. "What is that?" he asked.

"Oh, isn't it perfectly *lovely*? I only gave one and elevenpence halfpenny for it," cried his sister.

"It looks like it!"

"My dear boy, don't you admire it?"

"No; I think it is hideous."

"*Edward!*" remonstrated his family in chorus.

"Hideous, and out of place!" he declared again.

"Oh, you have not a scrap of taste. What a mercy it is the house is not left to you!"

"A great mercy, Gus! When is my dinner coming, mother?" he asked, turning round on his music-stool.

"Ada is gone to hurry the girl. Why, my son, you look very hot."

He smiled at her.

"And very dirty too, I expect, mother. Hot? Yes, I should think so. I shall go

up in a straw hat on Monday, if this weather lasts. Tom King came down in my carriage. He is coming along presently; he asked me to tell you."

Here Ada entered, carrying a tray on which was an underdone chop, some boiled potatoes, part of a rice pudding, burnt at the top, and some stewed plums. She set it down before him. He eyed it with dislike. A bewildered wasp buzzed across the tray and fell into the fruit.

"I don't want anything. Take it away again, if you don't mind. Couldn't I have had cold meat and a cucumber, mother?"

"You shall, dear, next Saturday, of course. I wish we had thought of it. But just try now that nice, juicy chop, just a bit of it," she urged coaxingly.

He shook his head, then leaned back uncomfortably against the piano and looked round the room critically. There were the green woollen table-cloth, the gilt looking-glass, the faded crimson rep chairs, the limp art-muslin twisted round the flower-pots in the wire stand near the window, the beaded

fly-catcher hanging from the chandelier, the brown lava spill-cases on the mantelpiece.

The sun was blazing into the room, but as Jessie, in her tumbled white blouse and old black shirt, chose to sit on the window-ledge, nobody had thought of lowering the blinds.

"What funny people you all are!" he remarked at last.

"Why?" demanded Augusta, who had produced some scarlet ribbon and was tying bows on to the Japanese fans.

"Oh, because you seem to prefer being roasted when you might be cool, public when you might be private, and you seem to have saved all the rubbish from the old place and to have piled it up in here. That's the only decent thing in the room," he added, pointing to his father's portrait.

"How cross you are!" said Jessie.

"I am hot, dirty, and tired; yes, and perhaps cross. I will go up and change, mother. Don't wait for me, girls; I shall not play tennis this afternoon."

"Which means that Flora Moore is not

coming, I suppose?" cried Augusta, mischievously.

"Oh, don't tease your brother. I am sure he tries to be obliging, whether Flora is here or no. Are you really going upstairs, my boy? Come down as soon as you have changed."

"I have some work I want to do. I will come down at supper-time," he said, as he went out of the room.

"Well, I shall bring you up some tea at four o'clock, as you have had no dinner," his mother called after him.

"Thanks, that will be very nice," he called back again.

"I say, mother, he's awfully gone on Flora. Did you see his face?" cried Augusta, as soon as the door was shut.

"So silly of him. She is ever so well off; she won't marry *him*," declared Jessie.

"Why not? What on earth can a child like *you* know about it?" cried Ada, laughing.

"Quite as much as you," answered Jessie, tossing her head. "Money goes with money, and Flora Moore has lots of admirers besides Edward."

"None half so good-looking," declared Ada.

"And certainly not half so good ; still I won't have him teased about her. Do you hear, girls ?"

"Oh yes, mother dear, we hear ; but why can't he talk about her openly, or stand a little chaff, like we do about Tom or Herbert ? He shuts up, and makes you feel you have broken the Ten Commandments, if you only mention her name. I do it all the more, just to cure him."

"Oh, Gus, you should not do that. He can't alter his nature ; we are not all made alike, you know," said Mrs. Hay.

"Here comes Tom King," announced Jessie once more, from her post in the window ; and the girls presently left the hot front room, and, with their mother, adjourned to the back garden, the lemonade, and the shady seat by the water-butt.

While balls were flying, and "serves" and "scores" were being vehemently discussed on the sun-burnt grass outside, Edward Hay sat at the table in his attic, poring over a

German grammar. The air was stifling, the thinly built little house seemed to be baked through, the brass door handle was hot to the touch, the bedroom candle drooped downward from the candlestick on to the mantelpiece. Wasps were crawling on the windowpanes. Next door somebody was practising Beethoven's Sonatas; a train was letting off steam in the station, the smoke travelled in and filled the room. In the open drawer of his table lay the precious "History of the County Families." Books filled a rough shelf which ran all round the room, chiefly German, French, and Spanish.

After a time there was a knock at the door—all the family knew his dislike to being interrupted—and, thinking it was his mother with the tea, he cried, "Come in!"

"Oh, Jessie, is it you? I don't think you had better stay up here, it is too hot," he said, without closing his book.

Jessie sat down on his low bedstead.

"I want to ask your advice," she said.

"About what? A new hat or a new lover?" he asked, laughing.

"Don't be stupid. I want to earn some money."

Her brother gave a long whistle and went on making notes in pencil on a strip of paper.

"Why do you whistle? What is to hinder me?" she demanded impatiently.

He turned round, clasped his hands on the back of his chair, and stared at her good-naturedly.

"I believe you are actually in earnest," he said.

"Of course I am; but I don't know how to begin."

"What do you want money for, my dear girl?"

"Oh, I don't know. I think it is more for the interest of the thing than for the money. I am tired of being here."

"You can't earn money, you know, without working pretty hard; you have never been used to do anything but amuse yourself."

"I know. I should only do it for a time, just for the fun of it."

"No good work is done in that spirit," he said, sighing.

"I don't care about doing good work ; I only want a change."

"Why, then, you little goose, as soon as you got tired of that you would want another change, I suppose ?"

"I suppose so," she answered, clasping her hands behind her head and leaning back against the wall.

"How odd girls are ! We men can't afford to feel like that. It is awfully bad for you not to stick to something."

"Don't preach."

At this he turned round to his book again.

Jessie sat still and stared at him. Presently she said—

"I suppose you are saving up every penny to get married with ?" Receiving no answer she went on, "Now, can't you see how uneven things are ? You have an object for saving and working. I have none. All my saving and honest toil would never give me the right to ask the man I love to marry me."

He turned round again and looked at her, then said slowly—

"That is true enough. But why should

you not work and save, apart from that ? I should think any fellow would rather marry a girl who showed she was capable of self-denial and application, than a mere feather-headed, well-got-up doll."

"Should you ? Dear me, then, I wonder you are so set upon Flora Moore," she returned saucily.

The dull red crept over his forehead.

"I don't think there is any occasion for you to be impertinent, Jessie. Let us go on discussing your ideas of work," he said stiffly.

"Well, if I find out where to go, will you lend me the money if I have to pay anything for learning, say in a hospital ?"

"No ; I never lend, but if you are really in earnest, and mother has no objection, I will give it to you."

"Why should you *give* it, Neddy ? I could pay it back."

"Yes, if you were in earnest you could, but I don't think you are. If I give it, then it will not be my concern what you do with it. If I lend it, every careless act of yours would be an annoyance to me."

"You are right, I dare say. When can I have the money?"

"My dear Jess, what a hurry you are in! It will take me much longer to make it, I expect, than it will take you to spend it."

"I dare say," she assented, clasping her hands round her knee, and swaying to and fro on the edge of the bed.

Her brother remained with his arm over the back of his chair and his chin leaning on it.

Another train shrieked past, smoke again curled slowly through the thick atmosphere and into the room.

"Those beastly trains!" muttered Edward Hay.

"Oh, they are not bad. I rather like them," answered Jessie.

There was another long silence.

"What sort of thing do you want to do?" he asked at last.

"I want to go as a stewardess on board some ship, going as far as ever it can go."

He burst out laughing.

"They won't take a child like you; you are

years too young, I expect. Think of something else."

From a very battered little purse Jessie produced a cutting from a newspaper, and proceeded to read it aloud to him. It stated that a colonel's wife, about to winter abroad with her children, was anxious to find a superior young person, fond of children, to help her.

"I'm a superior young person. I'm fond of children. I'm going," declared Jessie, laughing.

Her brother looked dubious.

"Mother won't like it," he said.

"Come, be honest; say at once that *you* don't like it. You think it is beneath our family dignity for me to earn money in such a manner, don't you?"

"You would not earn much; only twenty-five pounds a year, and your washing," he quoted from the paper she had handed him.

"Oh, I told you the money is the least part of it. Look here, do you see that?" and Jessie kicked off one of her well-worn shoes, which she sent flying across the room

and which hit the opposite wall. Then she stuck out for his inspection a small foot with an enormous hole in the heel of the stocking. "Now do you see why it is high time I went away, and had some sort of responsibility?"

"No, I am afraid I don't, Jess. Explain."

"Well, look here, I just don't feel it matters a straw what I do, or do not, here; whether I have holes in my stockings or not. I don't like reading. Mother keeps house. I'm not keen on tennis or parishes, like Ada and Gus. There does not happen to be a Tom or a Herbert pining to marry me, and making all these horrid little roads seem glorified to me for their sakes. If I stay on here much longer I shall get careless about a lot of things that matter much more than a hole in my stocking. So I am going to that colonel's wife, and you are going to give me thirty pounds, and I am going to keep it before me as a sacred duty to pay it back. And you will feel you have saved me from becoming like that awful Chandernagore girl, who is going silly because she has never had anything to do."

Edward Hay got up and leaned out of the little window. The paint of the frame was hot and blistered, a watercart was passing below in the stony road. Two and two all up the road the dusty young chestnuts drooped in the glare of the afternoon sun. At the red pillar-box there was a cross road ; in it were more pairs of trees, and more red-bricked villas. Beyond them, at some distance, was a thick mass of foliage, surrounding a square white house. It was the Vicarage belonging to the largest church in the neighbourhood. Flora Moore lived there.

“Well, when are you going to speak to me? Don’t get into one of your absent moods, Neddy, there’s a dear,” implored Jessie, as she got up, fetched her shoe, and came and stood beside him. She supported herself by holding his arm, while she balanced herself on one foot and put her shoe on to the other.

Her brother drew his head in from the window, saying—

“I am not absent, Jess, I was only

thinking over what you have just said to me. I wish you would leave off calling me Neddy. I suppose many girls must feel as you do. I never thought of it before. It seems all wrong, somehow, that any one should go melancholy, like that poor girl at Chandernagore, just through having nothing to do. I suppose you are right. If I were rich I should buy you a horse to ride, and perhaps you would feel different. But we are so poor that as you want a change you must earn it. The only drawback to your idea is that it does not lead on to anything else. Those children will grow up, and then they will not require you."

"Goosey, of course not. Don't you see that going out with those people is only step one? Step two will be that when they come back to England I shall not come, but stay out there in a school and learn French in return for English; and then—oh, who knows? Something will turn up. And, meanwhile, I shall have found it necessary to mend my stockings."

They both laughed, and, standing on tiptoe,

she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"You are really rather a good Neddy. Oh, I forgot you hate being called that. Flora will be lucky; but you are far too good for her."

He returned her caress gravely, but, as usual, whenever that name was mentioned, he said nothing.

"Don't *you* want to go abroad, Edward? You ought to go. Why, to judge by all these books I should think you know a lot of languages already, don't you?"

"None perfectly; but I intend to travel some day. I have only the evenings at my own disposal and——"

"Saturday afternoons, when discontented sisters take up all your time," she interrupted.

"I am glad to have been of use to you. Now you had better go down and tell mother, and write your letter at once," he said, as he opened the door for her.

"Well, I am awfully obliged to you. I hope you'll find somebody to help you as nicely in your hour of despair."

“ ‘Despair!’ ” he repeated. “What a big word for such an ordinary sensation as discontent! ‘Despair!’ What a big word to be uttered in such a commonplace, modern little house!”

“Ah, but it’s not uttered about a commonplace, modern little man,” she cried, laughing. “Why, if anything awful happened to you, you would not merely have an hour’s grumble like I have had, it would be like an earthquake in your life. And when that happens may I be well out of the way, that’s all.”

“There, my dear girl, leave off talking heroics,” he cried, retreating back into his room. He repeated Jessie’s words to himself as he changed his coat: “ ‘These horrid little roads seem glorified for their sakes.’ I suppose I know what she means?” And he again went to the window and stood long looking across to the Vicarage.

CHAPTER II.

ADA KING stood jogging her baby up and down at the drawing-room window of Dr. King's villa. She and Tom King had been married about four years. They lived with her father-in-law, a widower. The Kings had a very good practice between them, and Ada's home was larger and much better furnished than Byron Villa in the adjacent road, where her mother still lived.

Again it was summer, and a Saturday afternoon. The window was open, and the baby made vigorous but unavailing efforts to clutch the golden laburnum that the slight wind was blowing now towards, now away from him. His mother continued to jog him up and down, crooning snatches of "Robin Adair."

Presently, round the corner, swift, determined footsteps were heard. Ada King paused in her song, and held the child arrested at arms' length while she listened.

"Edward!" she cried. "I thought it must be you; how nice! No time to come in? Well, never mind, stand there and look at your nephew, and tell me the news. Did mother hear from Jess last night? and has she found anybody to give the new kitten to?"

"The Chandernagore children have got the kitten, and Jess wrote by this mail; here is the letter for you. Allow me to offer my usual remark, that matrimony agrees with you. Here, give me the boy. Come to me, old chap."

"He simply loves you to take him, next to Tom, of course. I'm glad I am not growing too utterly hideous; fat girls like me often do, you know. I say, Edward, don't let him eat that laburnum blossom. Can't he have your watch to play with?"

"Jess seems very jolly, doesn't she?" asked Edward Hay, as, swinging his nephew on to his shoulder, he watched his sister

glancing rapidly over the thin foreign letter he had given her.

"Gracious! Whatever does she mean by this absurd message to you—'Tell Edward I darn all my stockings most religiously, and feel sure I shall ever continue to wish to do so'?"

Her brother laughed, and answered—

"Oh, only a little joke she and I had before she went away."

"Who would have thought India would be her next destination? Our little Jess right hand to those nice people ever since she answered that advertisement. Awfully plucky of her. I see she says she has received those books she asked you to send out to her. Jess used not to be any more *booky* than Gus or I. Of course you are the only really clever one in our family. How amusing of her to think of coming back to train as a hospital nurse! Just what she always wanted to be. Well, I suppose I may keep this letter to show to Tom?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so," said her brother, somewhat absently.

Mrs. King regarded him admiringly as he took a step to the gate, hoisting the boy high up that he might clutch the red roses growing on the wire archway over it.

"Guess who has been to see me this afternoon," she demanded, when she had feasted her affectionate eyes sufficiently on her brother and her child.

"Who?" he cried, without turning his head.

"Herbert Moore. He only arrived last night. He tells me he likes his curacy immensely, and he asked me to tell you he hopes you will go up there to-morrow afternoon; he wants to see you. Oh, and that Colonel Green is staying at the Vicarage again."

This time there was no answer from the gate. Ada King sighed.

"Gus is going up to tea there to-morrow; you might walk up together," she remarked.

"I am on my way there now," said her brother.

"Oh, are you, dear? Well, then, give me the boy, and don't stop another minute. Oh,

you beauty, don't you just love to pull uncle's hair with your fat fist?"

Edward Hay approached the window and handed the child in to its mother. Then, smoothing down his ruffled hair, he put on his hat, which he had taken off for the baby's convenience, and looked at his sister's beaming face, as though he were about to speak. Her happiness was infectious, he smiled at her.

"Edward, oh, my dear, I do believe you have something good to tell me. Is it—oh, is it anything to do with the partnership? Tell me quick. Has uncle said anything about it?"

"Yes, he has."

"Oh, how lovely! What does mother say?"

"I have not told her yet. I shall tell her to-night. Poor old Reggie! If he had not died I should never have had this offer, at any rate not for years to come."

"Oh yes you would. Cousin Reg never was good at business; I have often heard uncle say so himself. Besides, I should think he would have been only too thankful to

keep you with him, anyway; so clever, so steady, and knowing such a lot about languages and drawing. And so frightfully good-looking too!"

He burst out laughing.

"Sisterly partiality. Don't forget that your brother is only a grave old business man, after all."

"He *happens* to be; but he is fit to be in any profession, which is better than being in a profession and only fit to be a business man. Besides, I don't know why I say '*only* a business man,' for people's callings don't matter much. It is what they are themselves that matters; that is what father used to say, I'm sure."

Her brother smiled at her vehemence.

"Well, good-bye," he said.

"Oh, stop. I say, Edward, may I tell Tom?"

He hesitated—a very unusual thing with him.

"Can't you wait?" he asked.

"Of course, but what for?" she said, in a disappointed voice.

"Till I give you leave. There, there, perhaps only till to-night," he cried joyously, as he kissed his hand to the crowing baby and went out at the gate.

He turned back and leaned over it, as though he would say more. But after watching her a moment he strode away up the road.

Ada King left the window suddenly, with an irritated gesture; she put the child down on the floor with some toys, and sat down to her sewing. Presently her husband came in. She did not rush to greet him, as was her wont, but sat still with her eyes on her work. He came up to her, put his hand under her chin, and turned her face upwards. Her eyes were full of tears.

"What's up?" he demanded.

The tears ran over, and, between laughing and crying, she said—

"Oh, Tom, Edward has just gone up to the Vicarage to propose to Flora Moore, and of course she won't have him. Isn't it awful?"

Tom King drew up a chair beside her and sat down.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"From his manner. He has just been here. I always hoped something would happen before he had the chance to do it." And Mrs. King dried her eyes vigorously.

"It was bound to come," declared her husband. "What an ass he is to have been taken in by that plausible, pretty little flirt all these years!"

"I wish Gus had never had her for a friend; I am sure she only put up with her because she was so fond of Herbert. And now we can't cut her as I should like to do. I begin to wish Gus and Herbert weren't engaged at all, I declare I do."

"Oh, rubbish! Herbert is a very good fellow; he and Gus are right enough. And as for dear old Ned, he must just get over this like many a better man has had to do before him."

"But, Tom dear, *why* should not Flora like him? She has got money, and Edward is not a pauper, and will soon be in a very good position."

"My dear child, have you not discovered

yet that girls like Flora Moore only like us men as an audience? They are not capable of liking us as individuals. Just think what an audience Ned has been to her all this time, noticing every trick of her dress and actions and words, always adoring, always ready at every moment when she did not happen to have any one else, thankful for a glance, drunk with a careless word of approbation, simply grovelling on receiving the most empty confidence. Why, the poor chap has been making a perfect spectacle of himself, and I for one am thankful he is going to be shut out of his fool's paradise once and for ever."

"But, dear, it's perfectly disgusting that she should never get a rap on the knuckles herself. It will be a most awful blow to Edward, and she won't suffer a bit."

"Not a bit," returned her husband, cheerfully, as he stooped to set up some wooden ninepins his boy was playing with.

"Well, I think she is an odious little toad, in spite of her scents and her curls and her lovely clothes!" declared Mrs. King, thrust-

ing her handkerchief vehemently back into her pocket. "Edward will never be the same again. Suppose I had pinned all my faith on to you, and you had gone and married somebody else, I should simply have died."

"Oh, pooh! Nonsense, my dear child."

"I should," she persisted, "if you had led me on like Flora has led Edward. And he is not like me; he is really romantic, and I am not, so I expect he has woven webs of extra glory round that wicked little thing. And he is so silent; he will just suffer and suffer, all to himself."

"It is a nasty business. I am afraid Flora is a tolerably bad lot. I pity the man who saddles himself with her in the end. Poor old Ned! Never mind, Ada, he will find somebody else some day, when he has got over this, and be a better man in the long run, too."

"It is a horrid process to have to go through before you can be 'a better man,'" bemoaned Mrs. King. "I'm sure I have talked to him about the visits of that elderly

widower, Colonel Green, enough to have opened the eyes of any one less infatuated than Edward."

"Instructive sight! Circe and her victims in the garden of a respectable, monied, suburban Vicar! I think you and I had better step up to-morrow and look at them."

"Who was Circe, Tom dear?"

"An ancestress of Flora Moore's."

"Oh, I suppose, then, it is in the family to behave like that?"

"I suppose so. No, by Jove! It is a shame to take you in. I'll tell you all about Circe another time. I wish you would step up to the cricket-ground with me now, if you have nothing better to do."

Mrs. King flew to get ready, and her brother's affairs went out of her head for a few hours.

Meanwhile Edward Hay, striding along the dusty roads, arrived speedily at the Vicarage gate.

The neat carriage-drive was bordered on either side by bushes of evergreen; through the bushes, on the right, was a path leading

on to a trim lawn, laid out with flower beds, and bare of all trees except one ash of quite respectable dimensions. In the shade of this tree a wicker tea-table was spread, and lying back in a luxurious lounging-chair was a very beautiful girl; on the grass beside her lay a youth gazing up into her face, and on the other side a middle-aged man sat, holding in his hands, and feeding with cake, a fine King Charles, with a blue ribbon round its neck.

At the tea-table presided a young man in clerical dress, bearing, on his honest bright countenance, a slight resemblance to the girl.

It was this group that Edward Hay saw as he came out of the path on to the lawn. In an instant he marked the soft folds of the dress that swept over the low lounge on to the grass, the glitter of the rings on the delicate hand, the frill of lace that hung from it as it reached out for a teacup, and the shape of the dark head resting against the white embroidered satin cushion. There did not seem to him to be anything in the garden

except that one bewildering form, and the sweet laugh that met his ears seemed full of the promise of joy for him as her voice said—

“Ah, here comes Edward Hay.”

“Well done, Ned, old man ; how good it is to see you again !” cried the young clergyman, heartily ; and Herbert Moore got up and came forward. “Green, you know, and this is Daisy Moore, a cousin. I believe there is a tradition that he was christened Godfrey, but he has always been called Daisy, probably on account of his extreme dissimilarity to that simple and innocent flower.”

“I won’t have my Daisy sat upon,” said the girl, in a low sweet voice ; “he reads poetry divinely, and carries all my parcels when I go into the district. I shall miss you dreadfully, Daisy, when the Long is over and you go up again to cram more wisdom into your nice ugly head. No, Edward, no more cake, thank you. Colonel Green has been offering that plate to me regularly every three minutes since four o’clock.”

“You took some every time, so I con-

sidered I was doing right," returned Colonel Green, looking straight at her.

"Yes, oh yes, certainly, but there comes an end at last to all sweet things," she replied lazily. "For instance, I want you to move and let Mr. Hay have your chair by me. Come here, Edward, and tell me what you think of my new photographs."

Colonel Green rose, deposited the dog on his mistress's lap, and, going to the table, helped himself to strawberries.

Herbert Moore tilted his chair on to its back legs, and, leaning back, clasped his hands behind his head and began to talk to his cousin. Colonel Green listened awhile, then said—

"Daisy, do you feel inclined to take my boy on the continent for a month?"

Daisy Moore got up from the grass, a surprised, pleased look on his face, and sauntered up to the table.

"I'm not exactly as fresh as a daisy, as Herbert said just now. Will you trust him with me?"

Colonel Green laughed.

"Come and walk round the garden and have a smoke and talk it over," he said.

As they walked away, Herbert Moore glanced at his sister and his friend, then said—

"Well, Flora, I'm going down to the cricket-field. You will stay and dine, Ned, of course ; my father will like to see you."

Then he too walked away, and Edward Hay found himself alone with Flora Moore. It seemed to him quite natural that everybody should have left them alone together under the ash tree ; it seemed to him that she had waited behind because it was sweet to her to be with him. He sat in a state of such excitement that he feared to trust himself to speak. He watched her hand smoothing the dog's head, the dog he had given her ; he watched the long curled eyelashes as they lay on her cheek ; he watched the rings of her dark hair as they lay on her forehead ; he had learnt the pattern of the lace on her handkerchief, stuck in her waistband in company with a bunch of white roses ; and he had marked the beautiful shape of her

daintily shod feet. The curled lashes slowly raised themselves, and she fixed her eyes upon his face.

"Do not let me keep you; everybody except us seems to have gone to the cricket-field. I find it too hot."

"I wish to stay," he managed to say.

"Ah yes; you always are so oppressively self-denying. Now, with such a face as yours you could afford to be as disagreeable as you liked. How is your uncle, and that clever bustling aunt of yours?"

He told her, then laid before her his good news about the partnership.

"Dear me, how very interesting! You will be able to leave business soon, I suppose—when you have saved enough, I mean—and be something else, will you not?"

"Leave business!" he echoed. "Why? What else could I start doing at my age? Why should I leave business?"

"Oh, because your father and your grandfather were in the Church, and your great-grandfather in the Army. It is a pity you should come down," she said tran-

quilly, her lovely face covered with dimpling smiles.

“Come down !” he repeated. “I do not quite see that. We must move with the times. Great numbers of men go into business now, just as great numbers of women earn their own living; the same class who fifty years ago would have done neither one nor the other.”

“Dear me ! You are quite eloquent. Do not get excited. Of course we must move with the times ; that is why my father is a clergyman, whereas his father was only a brewer.”

“The brewer earned the money to send his son to the University with ; the poor vicar had none, so his son has had to go into business.”

“To make money that *his* son in the future may be able to follow a profession ; I see,” she said, smiling up in his face.

At these words all his vehemence suddenly died away.

“You are glad to hear of my good fortune, at any rate, are you not, Flora ?” he asked in a low voice, bending towards her.

"Of course I am ; so will papa be. You must tell him at dinner. I wonder where Colonel Green and Daisy have gone to? They are always so amusing."

He laid his hand upon hers.

"I want to talk to you, Flora," he said.

"Is not that just what you have been doing ever since the others left us?" she asked, yawning. Then, as he said nothing, she looked at him. "Now *pray* do not make love to me ; you are the only man who has not done it yet," she said languidly.

"What else have I been doing all these years?" he demanded.

She laughed a laugh so lovely that, even in his excitement, he was conscious of wishing that she would prolong it. She looked at him out of those marvellously fringed eyes with cool daring, and said—

"I suppose you are alluding to that far-away day when you were silly enough to ask me if I would wait for you, and I was obliging enough to say yes, unless I saw any one that pleased me better?"

He stood towering over her, one hand leaning on the tea-table beside him, his eyes riveted on her face; he spoke in a low voice—

“Yes. I am alluding to that far-away day, as well as to a hundred others. Oh, Flora, do not play with me. You have always been so good to me. You have known that I could not speak before. I am in a position to do so now. You must listen to me.”

“If I *must*, I must, I suppose,” she said, with a shrug of her shoulders; then, unfurling her fan, she settled her head more luxuriously against her cushion, and, gently fanning herself, smiled up in his face and awaited what he had to say.

He stood there and poured out to her his hopes of years, his plans for the future—her future and his. He waxed eloquent; he lavished upon her all the endearing names that had for years lain ready in his heart for her. She never interrupted him, but continued throughout to listen and, in an intermittent manner, to fan herself.

He ceased at last, his strong voice sinking almost to a whisper from the excess of his feelings. It was quite still in the garden. An audacious sparrow hopped up, picked up a crumb of cake that had fallen on the grass, and flew with it in his beak on to a lilac bush near by.

"Look at him; sparrows are always so daring," said Flora Moore, in her silvery voice, pointing with her lace-ruffled hand.

"What?" he asked bluntly.

"I only said sparrows are always so daring; less plebeian birds have more modesty."

"I don't understand you. Oh, Flora, how can you attend to anything else in such a moment as this? You have heard all I have been saying. Be serious, my sweet one, and answer me."

"My dear Edward, do I understand you seriously to mean that you have been making me an offer of marriage? Because you know really it is very foolish of you. Even the dullest man, and you are not dull, must have taken to heart my abuse of business-

men all these years. I am sure I have told you a hundred times that nothing would induce me to marry a man in business. Have I not?" she persisted, leaning forward and tapping his hand with her fan, as though to arouse him from the rigid stare he was fixing on her.

"Yes, you have," he assented mechanically. "People often say those foolish sort of things. I paid no attention to them. You do not really mean it now."

"But I do mean it. You have always been the dearest fellow to have about, and papa is so fond of you. I am sure it is natural you should have been coming here so often to see me. Why, I was only a child when I first knew you. Besides, you are only one of many; when a girl does not happen to be too dreadfully ugly, of course there are always heaps of men to say pretty things to her. Do not stand glaring at me like that, but take your dismissal as a lover, and retain my acquaintance as a friend."

"I do not understand you," he said

hoarsely. "Are you telling me that you will not marry me?"

"Yes, my dear, dense Edward, I am telling you that I will not marry you."

He fell down on the grass, spread his arms over her, and buried his face in the folds of her dress; he shook all over, but he did not speak.

Flora Moore's eyebrows went up; she shut her fan impatiently.

"I should have thought you would have had more self-control," she remarked. He made no movement. "Don't kneel there, Edward; you look like the pictures in Sunday-school books of pious young men praying, or husbands at their wives' death-beds. Get up!"

He did not seem to hear her.

Presently she leaned forward and put her hand on his head and watched complacently her white fingers straying in his brown curls.

"Silly man, to take it to heart."

A shudder shook him.

"You have been the mainspring of my life," he said in a broken voice. "I suppose

I am not good enough for you ; you would not have married me even if I had had a profession."

"Oh yes, I dare say I should," she said cheerfully. "I always thought you were going to give up business. But, as we have been having such a very intimate talk together, I don't mind telling you what is a secret at present, that I am engaged to Colonel Green."

He started up and again stood beside her ; his face was white and stern.

"Since when?" he demanded in a loud voice.

"Let me see," she said, clasping her hands behind her head and knitting her brows—"let me see, since about a year, I think."

"*A year?* And you have let me come and go all that time, knowing that I considered you practically engaged to me?"

She nodded, smiling.

"Yes, about a year."

He turned away and strode up the lawn.

Flora Moore rose, shook out her dress, re-adjusted her roses, yawned, and, sitting down on the side of the lounge, picked up her hat

and began pulling out its lace bows. From time to time she glanced at the tall, broad-shouldered man at the other end of the garden.

"He will come back," she said to herself. "What a pity he takes things so seriously! He really looked extremely handsome while he was proposing; I think I should have stopped him if he had looked ugly. The very idea of *me* being buried in some villa a degree or two larger than Dr. King's, or some unfashionable, eminently respectable, but deadly dull terrace in town! What vanity these men have!"

She tied on her hat, pulled her curls out afresh on her forehead, then, stretching out her hand to the table, she daintily dipped a lump of sugar into the cream and held it out for the King Charles to beg for.

The dog sat up, the girl bent forward, the sun shone full over her lovely face and lit up the jewel that clasped her throat, and that flamed from her finger. She smiled at the dog and talked lovingly to him, in her caressing voice.

“Do you feel better?” she asked winsomely, looking up at Edward Hay, as he at last drew near.

He stopped a few paces from her. He looked long at her. His eyes were full of tears, his voice was full of misery, as he said at last very slowly—

“How beautiful you are!”

She laughed, drew the white roses from her belt, and tossed them to him.

“There’s for your pretty speech, which, though it lacks originality, proves you want to make peace.”

The roses fell at his feet unheeded, his eyes were still fixed on her.

“How beautiful you are!” he repeated again, “and how wicked! I think you must be quite the wickedest girl that has ever been made.”

“You are very rude, Edward.”

“Am I? I dare say.” He replied with the same slow painful utterance. “I wish you could die before you are able to do any more harm. I think I should not mind so much if I could think of you as really dead.”

"What nonsense!" she cried impatiently. "I am going indoors. You had better go home."

"I am going. Good-bye."

He stooped, picked up the roses, smoothed out their crushed petals, put them to his lips, and gently laid them beside her on the lounge. She watched him with a disdainful expression.

"Never mind those old roses, they are all faded now."

"They must not be trodden to pieces; they are what *you* have worn," he said.

"You may take them with you, if you like; something to remember your dead love by, and your uncivil speeches. You really have been very rude, you know. Confess that I have been very good to forgive you so easily."

He drew his hand wearily across his eyes, as if he were dreaming.

"*You* good? Do you know when I think of you, as I know I shall do, I shall always think of you as a devil. I think you must be the sort of creature that tempts a man

to kill you, and then to kill himself out of contempt for having done it."

Flora Moore ceased to smile.

"I am sure, if you feel so wicked as that, it will be only right for us not to see any more of you. I had no idea you had such an ungovernable temper. I must really beg that you will not come up here to-morrow with Gus, or indeed at all, for the present."

"It is my one prayer that I may never see your face again."

She got up and stood facing him.

"Shake hands ; we need not part in anger," she urged.

"What ? You would stoop to be friendly with me after all I have been saying ? It is not good-nature that prompts you ; it is your vanity, it is of a piece with all the rest. And yet," here the scorn in his voice died out—"and yet, oh how beautiful you are ! Why should you be so false ?"

"Poor fellow !" she said gently, as she put her hand on his arm, "you do not look so violent now ; I will relent, you may come and see me to-morrow, if you like."

He shook off her hand.

"You do not understand what you have done, not even yet. I begin to think you never will. I am going now."

He picked up his hat and stick, then remained looking at her long and silently, as she stood there in her white dress in the sunshine, her scarlet lips apart with a little disdainful smile. For the space of a long moment, which seemed to him an hour, they remained thus, looking at each other, then, with a heavy sigh, he turned and went slowly away out of the garden, leaving her standing smiling under the ash tree.

Not many days afterwards, when he was writing some letters in the office, his uncle passed through in conversation with a tall thin man. Edward Hay glanced at him, struck by his distinguished bearing and the quick keen glances he cast around him.

"Well, well," he was saying, "I have had more time to devote to books, it is true, than you have, but, my dear fellow, do not forget that 'They do most by books who could do much without them; and he that

chiefly owes himself unto himself is the substantial man.' ”

Edward Hay recognized the quotation, and for a moment he once more breathed in the old, loved atmosphere of his father's study.

“Who is that ? ” he asked when his uncle returned from seeing his friend to the door.

“Mr. Thornborough of Meads. As lads we were at the same school for a short time. He gets all he wants at Lawsons. He doesn't often come to town, but he generally looks in to see me. A fine example of a country gentleman, Edward. Though his life is so different, yet he knows more about our business than many men who are in it. I value his friendship highly.”

His nephew went on with the French letter he was answering. There were then people who did not estimate men in business as Flora Moore did, people like Mr. Thornborough.

PART III.

IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY.

“ Quelle race d’hommes ! quels types admirables ! La race basque est étrêmement remarquable par la beauté de son type, qui, grâce à la rareté des croisements, s’est conservé avec une pureté surprenante. . . . Un Montmorency disait à l’un d’eux : ‘ Savez-vous que nous datons de mille ans ? ’ ‘ Et nous,’ répondit le Basque, ‘ nous ne comptons plus.’ . . . Le Basque a vu toutes les nations passer devant lui ; nos jeunes antiquités lui font pitié.”



CHAPTER I.

"IT is a very pleasant proposal. I should scarcely have given Meakin credit for so clear and well-arranged a plan," declared Dan Thornborough, passing the letter to his sister.

She adjusted her glasses, read it through, then passed it to her niece.

"My turn next, please," laughed Gideon, who was sitting opposite to his cousin.

"We shall all have time to finish our breakfast before Sarah has sufficiently revelled in the plan to allow her to speak," said his uncle.

"I think, now that Sarah has attained to the age of eighteen years, her mind might be capable of benefitting by the sight of a foreign country," announced Aunt Rachel.

"Pass your uncle's cup, Gideon, if you please."

"I conclude it is on the cards that Sarah is to go abroad with the Meakins, isn't it, Uncle Dan?"

"There, read it," cried Sarah, sticking the letter into the toast-rack and pushing it across the broad space of white cloth between them. "Read the end part, Gideon, it is about you going; the first part is only about me."

"I consider it an act of unprecedented folly for Mabel to take the children. Home is the only suitable place for babies of five years of age," remarked Miss Thornborough.

"But Mabel intends to stay away three or four months, Aunt Rachel. Percy can't stop, of course. Gideon and I are only asked for a short time. Mabel tells us so on the second page, where she says there are sure to be people returning for me to travel with. That would not be necessary, of course, as Gideon would be with me."

"Your uncle and I cannot permit that,

my dear," said Miss Thornborough, looking meaningly at her brother.

"Can't permit what?" demanded Sarah.

"Bosh!" ejaculated Gideon, under his breath.

"Oblige me, Sarah, by fetching the green manuscript-book—the one labelled 'Foreign,'" said their uncle.

"Let me go," cried Gideon, starting up.

But Sarah was already at the door.

"I think the question of the return journey may be with safety deferred till the time comes," said Dan Thornborough, as he leisurely spread his marmalade.

"Oh, certainly," assented his sister. "I only mean that Sarah is so wild; it is the more necessary that you and I should take counsel concerning her."

"True, Rachel, most true; we will continue to do so as occasion may require."

Gideon said nothing. He was cutting spiced beef at the sideboard. The season was the end of January, and Christmas fare still lingered in old-fashioned Meads.

Gideon Leigh was paying dearly for his

latest piece of sport. At the end of the previous term he had gone duck-shooting with a man from his college. The weather had been so unusually severe that they had left even their dogs behind. Late into the inclement night they stayed out in a wild, marshy spot. Stiff and soaked through they managed to get home. His friend was none the worse, but Gideon had, for the first time in his life, taken to his bed, and there lay racked with such aches and pains that it was not till the New Year that he was able to travel to Meads, where he was slowly recovering.

Bearing all this in mind, Dan Thornborough remarked, as his nephew sat down again—

“I would go if I were you; Percy seems to think the sun will burn the cold out of you. The spring is inclement in England, and more especially here, and your joints seem to me to require oiling still.”

“They do,” laughed Gideon. “I shall have to miss a term, but I suppose I had better go. I cannot carry a gun even yet, and the two Georges had to hoist me up

yesterday when I rode over to my father's with Sarah. Did they tell you?"

"Ay, they told me. Shall you object to Percy as a travelling companion?"

"Lord, no. His fussiness is of real use abroad; he has the courage of his convictions. When we were in the Engadine last summer, we got on like a house on fire. I believe he learns his guide-book by heart before he starts—prices, weights, measures, and all. No, Percy is a trifle of a bore when at home, but he is not to be despised when abroad."

Here Sarah returned, and laying down the green manuscript-book beside her uncle, she kissed the top of his head and demanded—

"What does Percy mean by 'Euscarra,' and how on earth does he expect us to enjoy ourselves in a place where we can't talk?"

"Sit down, Sarah; your egg and your tea are already cold, and, my dear, how loudly you speak. You often quite make me start."

"I am sorry, Aunt Rachel, but really I think you should be accustomed to me by

now," said her niece, laughing. "It is all your fault; you have helped me to grow up so strong that of course I talk loudly."

"Silence!" commanded Gideon. "When Uncle Dan opens that green book let us be all ears, as when we were infants. He is about to answer your terrible craving for knowledge.

'But if the first Eve
Hard doom did receive,
When only one apple had she,
What a punishment new,
Shall be found out for you,
Who tasting, have robbed the whole tree?'"

He nodded at his cousin with mock gravity as he repeated the verse.

"Well, I have not nearly robbed the whole tree yet. I only asked Uncle Dan what 'Euscarra' was, and you want to know too, only you are such a lazy boy. You like me to find out, and then tell you, it saves you trouble."

"You have said it. The case stands just so. Proceed, instruct us, Uncle Dan."

Miss Thornborough looked doubtfully at him.

“I fear,” she said, “those lines are rather irreverent, are they not, Gideon? Such light mention of our First Parents should be discouraged. And though Sarah is so frequently to blame, I cannot in this instance censure her very proper desire for understanding her brother-in-law’s letter.”

Dan Thornborough had been turning over the leaves of the old extract-book, he had found what he wanted, and now waited with his finger on the line of writing. He observed now his nephew, now his niece, an amused, interested look on his face, and, before Gideon could answer his aunt, he began—

“I have here some passages which I have copied from time to time about the remarkable people among whom you will shortly be thrown. Just sit five minutes while I read them to you.”

“‘The “Euscarra” is the proper term for a certain speech or language supposed to have been at one time prevalent throughout Spain, but which is at present confined to certain districts, both on the French and Spanish

side of the Pyrenees, which are laved by the waters of the Cantabrian Gulf, or Bay of Biscay. This language is commonly known as the Basque, or Biscayan, which words are mere modifications of the word "Euscarra," the consonant B having been prefixed for the sake of euphony.'

"Then here is a translation from another work on the subject of those interesting people. Notice the marked traits which separate them from their most intimate neighbours in France and Spain. 'Their patriarchal character, their nautical tastes, their gaiety stamped with melancholy, their sweetness and their irascibility, their prejudice against all persons and things unfamiliar to them, their sobriety, their courage, their disdain of money, their ardent love of independence. Who were the ancestors of this strange people? Whence did they come? Are they the remainder of the inhabitants of Atlantis, mentioned by Plato, Atlantis that great island next to the Pillars of Hercules, whence the inhabitants might so easily have passed to the mainland before the

earthquake engulfed it? Or are they the remains of a migration of a people from the North commanded by Attila? Or are they descended from those masters of navigation, the Phœnicians, whose king Hiram lent Solomon his fleet to go to Ophir (that country which after the discovery of America was believed to be Peru), to fetch the gold with which Israel decorated the sanctuary of the Temple at Jerusalem?'"

"There is a great deal more, but I will not detain you. The Spaniards say that Satan once lived seven years in the Basque country, hoping to learn their tongue, but left baffled at the end of that period, declaring that he did not believe they understood it themselves.

"Very strange," said Dan Thornborough, leaning back in his chair and looking at his listeners—"very strange and of deep interest. I have always desired to visit those people myself."

"It is awfully interesting. Why not come with us, now? Do!" cried Gideon.

But his uncle shook his head, and, closing

the green manuscript-book he got up from the breakfast-table with it under his arm, and clasping his hands behind him he slowly walked out of the room.

"He did that last year when I asked him to come to Switzerland with Meakin and me," grumbled Gideon. "Why won't he ever go abroad, Aunt Rachel?"

"Ah, my dear boy, that has to do with what happened in his life long before you or Sarah were born. Your uncle dislikes all reference to it. I should be glad of your assistance, Sarah, in the workroom, where I have directions to give to Susan."

"I'll come. And look here, Gideon," she added, as her aunt left the room, "you just go to Uncle Dan and help him settle about dates and tickets and things, and be ready for a prowl with me this afternoon. Uncle Dan is going to ride over to Gray's Wick, so he won't want us."

"What is he going to Gray's Wick for?"

"To talk business with Mr. Gray."

"Gray? Is that poor little idiot chap dead at last?"

"Yes, and the new heir is there now."

"What do you think of him?"

"Oh, you must often have heard people speak of him; you know more than I."

"I do. But I asked what *you* thought."

"I like him," declared Sarah; "he is very clever."

"Just like you, you always do think such a heap of fellows who run after books," he returned, irritably.

"Books *and* horses *and* dogs *and* shooting *and* fifty other things," laughed Sarah.

"Gray is a puppy!"

"A pretty elderly dorg," she drawled, imitating an acquaintance.

Her cousin laughed, in spite of his annoyance.

"Look here, Sarah, Gray of Gray's Wick is not the sort of man for you to know."

"Then it is very bad for you to know him either, and I shall tell Uncle Dan what you say, and ask him to forbid you going over to Gray's Wick to play billiards. And it is quite the best table about here. You should

see it. But no, you must not ; I must protect you from dangerous associations, dear boy."

"Oh, Sarah, do be serious. Well, if you won't stop—— I say, of course I will go out with you all this afternoon," he shouted after her.

"All right," he heard her cry, as she rushed down the long passage leading to the work-room and banged a door behind her.

Miss Thornborough was sitting before a bale of grey flannel. Susan Frant and a housemaid stood in front of her, awaiting orders. The flannel was to be cut up for the yearly needs of an orphanage which for generations the Thornboroughs had supported in the town.

"Look at this great bale, child ; we cannot move it. What can Houseman mean by sending it up here uncut ? It is the fault of that new man of his, I suppose. I fully intended, with Susan's help, to have had the dozen frocks cut out to take to the matron when I drive into the town after lunch," said Miss Thornborough, in vexed tones.

Sarah stood considering.

"It is account morning, or I could stay and help," she said.

"Yes, my dear, and on no pretext whatever have I at any time permitted your uncle's hours to be interfered with."

"There is an hour yet," said her niece, consulting her watch. "You go at once and order dinner, and we three here will measure off the whole bale."

"Really, my dear, you are a great help. I must say that of late I have been considerably gratified by your readiness of spirit, and by your practical assistance."

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, you know I have always loved being in the thick of everything, only when I was small of course you very naturally did not consider me in my proper sphere. Do you remember my coming down to dessert at that dinner in your new bonnet and cloak?"

Here the housemaid showed signs of giggling, but was suppressed by Susan Frant.

Miss Thornborough rose and answered, as she replaced her spectacles in the case that hung at her side—

"I recollect perfectly, my dear, and I gave you for your punishment task a portion of the second canto of Sir Walter Scott's beautiful poem, 'The Lady of the Lake.'"

"Of course you did," cried Sarah, laughing "Don't you remember how I called Gideon, 'Back, beardless boy, back Minion,' for months after? But, come Susan, we must begin. Here, take the scissors; you cut, I measure, Kate can fold up."

In their ramble over the frosty country that afternoon, Gideon and Sarah discussed the coming trip from every point of view. Every detail of a journey abroad was new to Sarah, she had never been on a steamer, never attempted to speak in a foreign tongue, her uncle being of the opinion that no language could be satisfactorily learned save in the country where it was spoken. They were both in high spirits, and walked rapidly in the keen air. After a while Sarah slipped her arm through Gideon's, and said confidentially—

"Are you *very* sorry to have given up going into the Army?"

He walked for some time hitting the hedge with his stick and sending the snow flying off it on to the road.

"Do you know why I did give it up?" he asked at last.

"Not the faintest idea, dear boy," she said in her clear, strong young voice.

"You never heard any discussion about Leigh Court or Meads, never heard my father say anything to Uncle Dan?"

"Never," she declared again.

"Oh, well, then—— Oh, I say, Sarah, I wish I were twenty-one," and he began again to strike the hedges, pressing Sarah's hand more closely against his side with his other arm.

"You have not long to wait, only till the spring," she said, laughing. "What are you in such a hurry for?"

"Wasn't Gray consul out at some place or other? What a confounded nuisance of him to have inherited Gray's Wick! Who wants him here?" was Gideon's apparently irrelevant remark.

"What on earth has Mr. Gray to do with your coming of age?"

"Oh, Sarah, you are so dreadfully young," he said dolefully.

She laughed.

"So are you, dear boy. But you have been a great puzzle ever since you came home, what Susan calls '*quite touchy*.'"

"Not to you, Sarah, surely? I'm awfully sorry, anyway, but——"

He broke off, and his cousin suddenly withdrew her arm and snatched his stick out of his hand.

"There! Now you can't bang the poor hedges any more. I have not had an answer to any of my questions, about the Army, or your being twenty-one, or why Uncle Dan won't go abroad, or anything, and I don't mean to ask again. Poking my nose into other people's affairs is not one of my many virtues. I'm awfully glad you are coming abroad with me."

"Are you, truly, honour bright?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, dear boy, it shows you have not the least idea how much I miss you. Fancy your doubting that I am glad!"

He crossed to her side of the road, and put his arm through hers; they fell into step and marched along for a few minutes without saying anything, Sarah dexterously tossing and catching his stick with her left hand, Gideon making grabs at it and finally possessing himself of it.

Sarah thrust her hand deep into the pocket of her jacket, declaring her fingers were frozen, and then said composedly—

“I am so glad I am a farmeress; look at all these acres of land, I suppose lots of girls would march all over it without having the least idea what was going to be put on it?”

“*Rather!*” said Gideon, admiringly.

“You see there is Leigh Court for you to be interested in, and Meads for me. How jolly it is that we care about the same things! What a huge boy Fred is growing! But he is rather spoilt, it is all Aunt Mary’s doing. It makes Uncle Dol all the harder on him.”

“By Jove, yes! Fred is nearly fifteen. Spoilt! Yes, worse luck. Poor chap! he ought to have had Uncle Dan behind him all

these years ; my father does not understand him."

"Well, I'm sure Fred is devoted to you ; he is lucky to have such a brother. But, do you know—— Don't tell anybody, promise."

"I promise."

"You know when he and I were at the eel-trap, and he fell in ?"

Gideon nodded.

"He cried—he actually *cried* !"

"Nonsense !"

"Poor boy ! he did ; the slime and mud were all over him of course, and a great eel wriggled over his face in the rush of water, and I was laughing so much that I could not tell him that he was quite safe. I helped him out, and he sat down on the grass and simply blubbered. *We* never cried, not even when you gashed your leg with the scythe."

"Poor chap ! I expect you and I have the good luck to be made of sterner stuff. My father frightens him ; he hates anything that is afraid of him, and Fred knows it."

"Well, dear boy, if anybody can make a man of Fred, you can."

"Sarah," said her cousin, suddenly stopping in the middle of the road, "this is the very spot where I fought that fellow ; do you remember ?"

"So it is, the very spot ; and it was here the girl scratched me for keeping her off you."

"Do you remember what you did before we moved off home ?"

Sarah's wide-open blue eyes stared straight into his.

"Yes ; I kissed your poor bruised face, and you told me to pick up our clothes and not be a muff, so I did," she said, laughing.

"I should not say that now, Sarah," he ventured, returning the stare with eyes full of adoration.

"No, and I should not kiss you now, either ; so you see, dear boy, we have grown quite polite to each other since then."

"Why wouldn't you kiss me now ?" he demanded regretfully.

"Oh, I don't know. Grown-up girls and boys don't kiss. Come along, Gideon. Look, the sun is nothing but a red ball behind

Jacob's house, and the frost is settling all over my fur; we must hurry. How glorious it is! Let us take hands and run down the hill."

He had no choice, she impetuously dragged him on, and hand-in-hand they rushed down, till, reaching the bottom they charged into two horsemen who were turning out of the cross lane on to the road. They rapidly reined up, and half a dozen dogs jumped and barked around them.

"Eh? What? God bless my soul, it is Dare-devil Sally and my lad!" shouted a jovial voice out of the tumult.

"It is Uncle Dol! Oh, uncle, what fun! Here, give me your hand, quick," cried his niece laughing, then, seizing it, she put her foot on to his boot and sprang up behind him.

"Bravo, Sally! A pity there is no mount for you, lad," and Sir Godolphin Leigh moved on, Sarah chattering to his delighted ears.

Gideon stood still, patting the neck of his uncle's horse.

"Been out together all the afternoon?" asked Dan Thornborough, bending down to his nephew, who glanced up at him with a wistful look.

"Yes," answered the young man.

His uncle laid a hand on his shoulder and said in a low voice—

"Patience, my boy."

Gideon leaned his arms against the horse's neck and laid down his head on them.

"She does not care for me in that way in the least," he groaned. "My great grandfather married at twenty-one, and our great grandmother was only seventeen; Sarah is eighteen, but she does not understand a bit."

"She is none the worse for that. Pluck up your courage. Play the man," said his uncle, kindly.

"She has been asking me why I gave up all thought of the Army. She does not seem to have any idea about joining the two estates, or that it seems best to stay with my father, who has so little idea of managing his."

His uncle was silent. He shook the reins

and his horse began to pace slowly along. Gideon Leigh walked at its side.

"You still think I made a mistake? You would have had me take up a profession as I wished, even if I meant to look after the land later on?"

"I had my say, Gideon."

"I know you did. I agreed with you. It has all been my father's doing. My out-look is pleasant enough, but I should have been a better man in the end if I could have had a turn at what I was cut out for before I settled down." And the young man stretched out a mighty pair of arms, then let them fall heavily at his side.

"Ay," assented his uncle, "a much better man."

"You dear old chap, how you do understand a fellow!" cried Gideon, affectionately.

"I practised on my brother Jasper, years ago. Your grandfather was averse to his entering the Army, I upheld Jasper."

"I expect you were always a brick. I suppose Sarah is very like her father, isn't she?"

"No; she is your mother over again, only Jael was dark. I sometimes think, Gideon," he added regretfully, "that it is I whom you are like. In fate as in character."

His nephew looked quickly up at him.

"You mean——?" he asked.

"That you will love as I have loved, lose as I lost, and stay on the land as I have stayed."

Gideon Leigh said nothing; he had never before heard his uncle allude to the trouble of his youth.

They paced along in silence till the cheery voice of Sir Godolphin sounded through the frosty air and the darkness, shouting—

"Here, my boy, come and open this gate. That rascal of yours, Dan, has shut it, though we told him not to."

Then the young man reached a hand up, laid it on his uncle's arm, and said, in answer to his last words—

"A man might play for a poorer stake than that of becoming a second Dan Thornborough. I am willing to take the odds."

A pleased look came over his uncle's face, he smiled.

“‘Crabbed age and youth cannot live together,’ eh? You and I at any rate have proved that saying untrue. You were ever a generous and forbearing lad.”

Gideon laughed.

“There is not much of ‘crabbed age’ about you. All right, I’m coming,” he shouted, as Sarah’s voice was heard impatiently demanding to have the gate opened.

“Sarah, always Sarah,” said Dan Thornborough to himself, as he walked his horse leisurely towards the gate. “I differ from Rachel, who is so certain that the child will take the lad. Well, well, sending them out to see the world is surely the best I can do for them both at present.”

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT after the receipt of Percy Meakin's letter, Gideon and Sarah joined their relations in London, and a few days afterwards the whole party found themselves settled in a small town on the French side of the Pyrenees.

Here, from the snow and mists and keen winds of their northern home, they came into a land of sunshine, budding trees, and gentle breeze. Here was a pleasant social life among winter visitors, in a friendly town, all bent upon amusing or being amused during the winter months they had to spend together.

Those families who had been there since the previous autumn were already all acquainted, and when the Meakins arrived a constant round of expeditions, tea-parties,

and dances was going on, in which they were not slow to participate.

Sarah began to make discoveries. First, that her nephew and niece were nervous prigs, their small minds forced into premature development by her sister. Also, that the standard of right and wrong among the people she met was a very elastic one compared with that which she had been required to satisfy at Meads. Also, that she herself was looked upon as an heiress, and her cousin Mr. Leigh was pronounced to be "handsome"; and that it was actually regarded as possible that he was old enough to be married, and that one or two young ladies in the English colony were spoken of as being suitable for him.

All these things set Sarah thinking, with the result that she was so puzzled that she put them aside to discuss with her uncle on her return home, and yielded to the spirit of the hour with all the zest that her youth and vigour afforded her. But sometimes her views clashed against her sister's, and promptly she delivered her testimony.

"Now then, children, make haste and go to bed," she ordered briskly one evening, when the whole party were going out to a dance at one of the hotels and May and Robin still lingered over the house of cards they were building.

"We're going with you," they answered.

"Nonsense! Bed is the proper place for you two mites. Come, be off; Julie is waiting for you." And Sarah laid a ruthless hand on the cards, upset the house, and shuffled them all away into a drawer.

The children made no moan, but buried their faces in her silken skirts, murmuring—

"Oh, how nice your frock smells! Like lavender. Mother's has sandal-wood folded up in her's, and we have got some sewn into ours."

"Disgusting children! Soap and water is all you ought to know about in the way of scents. There, run along, and Aunt Sarah will come and tuck you up, like nice little dormice."

"Do, do. But you must wait till we come home. I mean to dance every dance," an-

nounced May, getting on a footstool to reach her mother's fan off a marble console-table.

Sarah stared.

"So this is the meaning of your best frocks, is it? You really are going?"

"In course we is," declared Robin, the more babyish of the two, "and Julie says I may eat four macaroons when I have danced with Léonore four times."

"You have been out all day; it is perfectly cruel to keep you up now. I would talk to your mother only it is never any use. I tell you what it is, grown-up people and children ought not to go to the same parties; so if this is the sort of party for you, it can't be the one for me, so I am going to bed. Good night. I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

"Aunty Sarah, oh, you are so funny! Don't go. Oh, please stay with us. If you don't go it won't be half so nice. I shan't have anybody's lap to sit on when I'm sleepy. Mother is always dancing, and father too."

But Sarah was inexorable.

"I'm going to bed," she declared. "I

want you to tell mother why, as soon as she comes in."

Soon after she had left the room Gideon came in ready to go.

"Now then, you small people, where is Sarah?"

"Gone to bed," they announced awestruck, standing hand-in-hand before him.

"No humbug!" he cried, laughing; and sitting down he pulled them on to his knees.

"Now then, where is she?"

"Gone to bed. She says if *we* are going it must be the wrong sort of party for her, 'cause she's grown up. We're so sorry."

Gideon began to understand.

Mrs. Meakin came in, slim, well-appointed in toilette, and elegant as usual.

"Oh, Gideon, how kind you always are to my darlings! You will spare May one nice little turn round the room as you did the other night? I really think her steps are better than Léonore Dupré's."

Gideon put the children gently down and stood up.

"I am not sure that I shall go," he said.

"Why not? You are ready dressed. My dear Gideon, there will be such heart-breakings if you stay away. What else are you going to do?"

"It is a wild night, I think I shall go and get Pierre to come for a stroll along the cliff with me; the sea must be splendid."

"Going out with Pierre? You glory in being queer. I am quite disappointed in you." And Mabel Meakin sank down on the sofa and pointed to a footstool.

He fetched it for her, saying—

"I don't 'glory' in anything that I know of. Pierre is very good company; he tells me all about the habits of the people in these parts. Besides, I don't feel inclined for all the gas and Babel of languages in the hotel to-night."

"I cannot think why you got ready if you did not mean to go. Where can Percy be? He has not come in. We shall be late."

"I'll go and hunt him up. He is upstairs on old Murray's flat, I think. Good-bye, babies, have a good time, and dance all the dances."

So saying he left the room and went along the corridor to his cousin's door, at which he tapped gently. Sarah's clear voice answered briskly—

"Can't come in, whoever you are, French or English." Then she added in French, "I am gone to bed."

"I say, Sarah," he began in a low voice.

The door was torn open and Sarah stood before him in the gleaming dress in which she had intended to go to the dance.

"Halloa!" she cried, "I suppose you are just off. The children have told you I'm not coming, I suppose. I want to give Mabel a lesson."

"Don't go to bed, you absurd girl, come out along the cliff for a walk; it is a glorious night."

"Aren't you going with Percy and Mabel?"

"Of course not. It is no fun without you."

"You *dear* boy. What a pity I did not happen to tell the children I was going for a walk instead of saying I was going to bed, then I could have come!"

Gideon saw that he should have to go for his walk alone. Anybody else but Sarah he would have attempted to persuade.

"I'll come back when they are gone, and you and I will have supper here together," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"Won't do. I told those chicks I was going to bed, so to bed I must go, or they will never believe me again. Tell Mabel to bring them in to see me. Of course I never thought of your staying away too. I say, it will go all over the town. What fun! Mabel will never have the face to take those poor babies out again in the evening. Everybody will be so dreadfully angry when they find out the reason you and I stayed away. Poor Mr. Ferdinand Smith and that nice young Spaniard and Monsieur Dupré! I promised dances to all of them. What fun!"

Gideon laughed.

"It is hard lines on them," he said.

"There, go, quick. Bring me the second volume of my book; I must have something

to read all the evening. Oh no, you need not; I will go to sleep instead, and be ready for a walk at six to-morrow morning, as I can't go with you to-night."

"All right!" he answered, as she shut her door as suddenly as she had opened it.

It took Mabel Meakin two or three days before she clearly understood the reason for her sister's action.

"I suppose Sarah and Gideon had been having a quarrel; all that nonsense about the children was merely a blind, of course," she said to her husband.

They were walking home after changing their books at the library. They stopped to greet an acquaintance, and when they passed on again Percy Meakin answered—

"About that silly affair the other night, I was going to say that I think you had better let the children stay at home on a future occasion. I did not see any others there, excepting that mincing little brat Léonore."

"You don't mean to say you really think Sarah stayed at home because I took the

children, do you?" demanded his wife, incredulously.

"I don't mean to say anything, except that I won't have the children taken out again at night."

"And you think, then, that Sarah had not been quarrelling with Gideon?"

"Of course she had not. It seems to me that I know your sister better than you do, Mabel."

"Well, I never thought Sarah was spiteful before. The children dance really beautifully, it is very disagreeable of her to have prevented my taking them out. What is the use of their dancing, if nobody is to see them?"

"Sarah has not prevented your taking them. It is I who have forbidden it," he said coolly.

"Oh, if I can feel you would not allow it any way, that makes all the difference, of course," she replied, with a relieved air.

Her husband was smoking. He said nothing for some minutes. Then his wife began again—

"I am rather disappointed in Sarah ; she promised to be pretty, but nobody would call her so now, would they ?"

"Oh, she is good-looking ; not a beauty, of course, but certainly more than passable. Her hair is very fine ; you don't often see that spun-gold sort of hair."

"No Thornborough has ever been ugly, so I hear," she returned. "But the heiress of Meads ought to be really beautiful."

"Why ? With Meads at her back it could not matter how plain she was, I should have thought."

"Look at Gideon, now. Everybody here simply raves over his good looks. He has not the least self-consciousness. And I don't believe Sarah sees that he is at her feet. So silly of her. I want to shake her sometimes."

"I would not try if I were you," he said laughing. "Your uncle is the only person who can manage her."

"Of course Uncle Dan is a perfect dear. But don't slang Sarah too much, Percy. She is very good to the children, and they

obey her much better than they do us. She is really very kind-hearted, you always agree to that, you know you do."

"Oh, I am very fond of Sarah; she is a thoroughly good sort. I flatter myself I understand her. I should not care to have had to marry her, though."

"My dear Percy, I should hope not. I know you never have admired those big, bouncing sort of girls. I can't imagine how it is that Sarah and I are so different."

"Bringing up, I suppose, considering you are both from the same stock. *Voilà tout!*"

"How beautifully you do pronounce, dear! To change the subject. Can't we make that expedition over the border before Sarah goes?"

"Yes. Next week. I have made out all the trains. Ask the Ferdinand Smiths and the Clintons to come too. They intend going; we might make up a party if young Clinton is up to it."

"Oh yes; the days are so warm now, it won't hurt him. It is a very good idea. But what shall we do about the language?"

There will not be a word of Spanish among us."

"We shall not want it," he answered. "We can take lunch with us, and the four o'clock train gets us back here in time for *table d'hôte*. We need not speak a word of that beastly Spanish."

"Look, there they are, coming down the hill. Oh, Percy, what a goose she will be if she does not marry him!"

The husband and wife stood still and watched them coming. The sun shone on Sarah's yellow wavy hair, and lighted the dusky shadows of Gideon's curls. He carried his hat in his hand, covered with his handkerchief, and from time to time he stopped that she might look at something it contained. Their two strong, straight figures stood outlined against the white road, as they tramped down it in step, laughing and talking eagerly. A woman of the country, driving an ass with panniers, paused to look at them, then went on smiling to herself. Two soldiers, leaning out of a window smoking their pipes, leaned out still further

to watch them coming. The girls of the convent school, conducted by two solemn Sisters, turned each one to stare as they passed them. The old Curé lifted his hat and beamed, as he crossed the road in front of them to go into a house. A child ran barefoot out of a doorway and offered them violets. Gideon threw her a coin, and handed the violets to Sarah; she divided them, stopping to stick half into his button-hole and half into her own.

The gorse beside the road was in blossom, the sails of the fishing-boats shone red, and the sea sparkled in the sunshine.

"Spring and youth and strength, and sunshine and flowers, and those two making love. Very appropriate," remarked Percy Meakin, critically.

"Sunshine! Yes, indeed. It is too hot to-day for my fur cape; I wish you would carry it for me. I could eat a cream cake, I think; come in here and get one for me," said Mabel Meakin, carelessly.

At nine o'clock one brilliant morning in the week following, the Meakins and their

friends stood on the platform waiting for the train which was to convey them as far as the border town, where they would change into the Spanish train. Percy Meakin was in his element, he had commanded his little troop each to bring their packet of lunch, their coat or shawl as a protection after sunset, and some Spanish money in case they should wish to make purchases. He himself carried in a strap his guide-book, his maps and conversation book, his packet of lunch, and a light overcoat; his binocular hung in a strap across his shoulder. A leather case containing the tickets of the entire party reposed in his breast-pocket.

The youth he had spoken of to his wife as "young Clinton" was the only serious invalid among them, and the mildness of the weather weighed finally against the anxious fears of his sisters and brother who were also of the party. Ferdinand Smith stuck to Sarah, which did not offend Gideon Leigh to whom she had confided that he was "an awful sawney."

On changing at the frontier they found

themselves in the various compartments of a long third-class carriage. One of the Ferdinand Smiths leaned forward and began to explain the probable nationalities of the other passengers to Mrs. Meakin.

Sarah overheard part of his remarks, and gathered that there were Basques, French, and Spaniards; she might have gleaned more had she not been entirely absorbed in watching a fair-haired peasant woman, with a blue handkerchief twisted on her head, talking volubly to a clean-shaven man in the blue blouse and bonnet of the country. The woman gesticulated and laughed, showing her white teeth; the man listened and nodded, putting in a remark from time to time. Their loud voices, fearless, frank glances, their air of substantial prosperity and noble cast of feature attracted Sarah strangely, and the peculiar roll of their words and emphasis made her say at last—

“I know it isn’t French; but I wish I knew whether it was Basque or Spanish.”

She spoke out clearly to Gideon, who sat opposite to her. The couple stopped talking

and surveyed her with frank, interested eyes.

"What does it matter? All these jargons are alike; one sound more hideous than another," cried young Ferdinand Smith.

"Gideon, which is it? Ask Percy to listen when they begin again, he might know."

"I should think it is Basque; but then, as I have never heard Spanish spoken, it may turn out to be Spanish," said her cousin. "Percy won't know. Listen, they are at it again. It is very melodious. I expect they are Basques, they look that type."

"I do wish Uncle Dan were here, he would be sure to know. It is very stupid. It is like walking in a dark room, to be going about with people you can't understand. I do *wish* I knew," insisted Sarah.

"Those people are Basques. They are speaking their own language; it is not Spanish. They have just been deciding that you are an English party out on an excursion," said a man's voice in English, from the next compartment, immediately behind Sarah.

She turned round sharply, but could only see him sideways.

"Thank you," she said. "Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

Gideon Leigh nodded to him.

"Thanks," he said. "It is a difficult language to follow."

"It is," replied the stranger, and seemed about to speak again; but Sarah had leaned forward, and was dragging May and Robin into a corner near the window, so that they might see out. Presently they stopped at a station, and several passengers got out. Somebody went to the window, asking questions of the guard, who answered him, banged the door, and the train went off again. Sarah had jerked round to see who was speaking. It was the same man who had addressed her.

He resumed his seat, this time not so immediately behind her. Their eyes met.

"Were you talking Spanish?" demanded Sarah, admiringly.

"Yes."

“How clever you must be!”

The stranger smiled.

“I do not speak it very well,” he said.

“If you understood it yourself you would know.”

She edged round sideways, so that she could see him better.

“That makes two languages you know.”

“No, only one. Nobody ever learns to speak Euscarra. I understand it a little, that is all.”

“Euscarra, Gideon ; do you hear ? That is what Uncle Dan read to us about ? Do you remember ? ”

“Yes, of course I do. Did you bring any sketching things with you ? ”

“No, I forgot. Ask Miss Clinton.”

And Sarah turned round and began her catechism again.

“Do you speak French ? Comfortably, I mean ; not with a stammer ? ”

But the stranger seemed to have been aware of the disapprobation in Gideon’s voice, and Mrs. Meakin suddenly said languidly but clearly—

"Who are you talking to, Sarah? Put up the window, or May will get toothache."

So all he said in answer to Sarah was—

"Yes, I speak French."

Then drawing a book from his pocket, he took the only vacant seat in his compartment on the opposite side, and was soon absorbed in his reading.

"Well," declared Sarah, turning round again to her own party, "he must be very clever. I wanted to talk to him. Why did you bother me, Mabel?"

"You can't talk to every stranger you meet, my dear child," said her sister, tranquilly.

"I don't want to," returned Sarah, haughtily. Then, catching her cousin's eye, she laughed.

Soon after this they reached their destination, and all got out. The train had gone on again before it occurred to Sarah to nod a good-bye to the stranger. When she looked back, the carriage they had been in had already got beyond the platform, and the curve of the line hid it from her.

The object of the expedition was to see a certain harbour. Its entrance between two walls of rock was a long narrow passage, opening out into a sheet of water shaped like a vast inland pond. On its shores all round was a small straggling town of wooden houses ; beyond them towered the mountains. The train had brought the party almost to the edge of the harbour, among the dark-beamed houses whose sides the water washed. Facing them across the harbour was the narrow channel leading out between the walls of rock into the surging open sea beyond.

“ Now I understand a harbour at last ! ” declared Sarah, gazing with delighted eyes.

Everybody laughed.

“ What a place for artists ! ” cried some one. “ Look at all those wonderful carved balconies, with those sad-coloured olive and red-brown garments hanging over them. Look at those peeps of green mountain-sides through open doorways, and stone steps from the streets between the houses up to the hills.”

"Where to first, Mr. Meakin?" cried somebody else.

"To the church across the harbour;" and he marshalled his party towards the boat, which an excited, bare-legged fisherman was holding in readiness.

During their passage across the harbour Sarah never spoke. She had not dreamed of such a place. She sat quite still, holding Robin's little cold fingers in her own warm ones, staring around and across and above.

"Don't talk to me," she said once, when Gideon made some remark. "Dear boy, there are plenty to talk; let me alone."

They examined the great dark church, the fine ironwork on balconies, doors, and lamps, the wooden houses, the shipping. Afterwards they spread their lunch on one of the stones that lay beside the winding path leading round the cliff to the lighthouse. The air was clear, the sunshine brilliant; the harbour was full of vessels, the inhabitants busy. Snow still lay far away on the mountain-tops, which seemed to touch the sky. The hours went by; it became time to

recross the harbour and go back to the station. It was difficult to collect all the lounging, laughing, talking party, and when they disembarked on the stone stairway, they saw their train slowly coming into the station.

"Hurry, hurry! These trains are very leisurely, we may just catch it," cried Percy Meakin.

But for once the train was not leisurely, and as they hurried into the little station the train steamed out of it.

"I suppose we can take the next?" said somebody.

"Oh yes, or get carriages and drive home. We cannot have come more than twenty miles," said another.

"No, at the most not more than that; it is dawdling about on the frontier that takes up the time," declared a third.

Percy Meakin came up to the group.

"I am very sorry. We ought to have allowed more time to cross the harbour. There is no train back for four hours, and of course there are no carriages to be had.

There are no hotels here ; this is merely a harbour, you see."

A council was held on the little gravelled platform. The officials had retired into a sort of shed ; there was not a creature about but themselves.

Finally, some of the party, after consulting Mr. Meakin's excellent maps, decided to walk back, only twelve miles, by going over the mountains. After they had started, it was suggested that the remainder should occupy the time by going to see the large and bustling town of San Pascual, only three miles off, and a tram being descried going along in the road in that direction, they hurried towards it and got in.

"Now we are really in for it. All on our way into a big Spanish town, none of us able to speak or understand a word, four hours before us, and dinner to be ordered somehow. This is what *I* call an adventure," declared Sarah with satisfaction.

Her brother-in-law got out his guide-books ; the responsibility was becoming serious. Young Clinton looked white and

languid, his relations polite, but evidently very anxious. The children were excited. It would be impossible to reach home again before eleven o'clock that night. His wife sat placidly at his side ; other people were, as usual, taking care of her children.

"Shall we have enough money for a dinner, do you suppose ? Everybody spent a lot of money in that old shop on the quay," she remarked to him.

"Oh, we shall do, if they will take English gold. I have no French money left," he replied. "It is a great bore. The whole expedition is spoilt."

Sarah overheard him.

"Don't say that, Percy. It was not your fault. I, for one, think this is great fun ; we shall manage somehow. And as for the children, I'll see they don't tire out Mabel. It is a tremendously long day for them."

Then they relapsed into silence and jogged on for about a mile. There was nothing to see along the country road, and the few people in the tram were not interesting.

Sarah put her arm through Gideon's, and,

leaning against him, began to tell a story to May, who was perched on his knee. One of the Clinton sisters had taken compassion on the excitable Robin, and held him by his small coat, standing in the doorway, so that he could see the horses.

Suddenly Sarah stopped in her recital.

"Look there, Gideon. Quick! Coming down the bank into the road. Do you see? There is the man who was in the train this morning. I do believe he is going to get in here. Yes, he is swinging himself up the step. Here he comes."

The stranger entered, and sat down opposite them. Recognizing Sarah, he lifted his hat in answer to her smile, but said nothing.

Sarah continued her story in a low voice, but hurried it to an end, for she saw the stranger's brown eyes were fixed upon them, though he looked over her shoulder and out of the window every time she glanced at him.

Presently Percy Meakin and Ferdinand Smith began to discuss the value of Spanish

money, and the advisability of going first or last to look over the church of San Pascual. The stranger began to look interested, set them right on one or two points, and when the tram stopped at the corner of a large square, and they all got out, the three men were so busy talking, that the rest of the party followed them slowly towards the great church. There seemed a tacit understanding that the stranger was to be of their party, for he entered with them, and Percy Meakin plied him with incessant questions. Mrs. Meakin and one of her friends kept close to them; one of the Clinton girls dragged Gideon off to look at an altar; Sarah, holding her nephew and niece by the hand, wandered aside to watch a baby being christened, and to examine the collection of black-hooded and cloaked women who were attending the mother.

"Is he dusting the baby? What is he doing?" asked Robin in a whisper, clutching his aunt tightly.

"Can't imagine," she replied.

"It looks more like a funeral than a

christening," whispered May. "I don't think he is dusting the baby ; I think he is holy-watering it, like Julie tells us about."

"Hush!" commanded Sarah, "we are in church."

They stood listening to the priest's monotonous voice till the service was over and he went away ; the bustle among the women seemed to suggest that they were going also.

Then Sarah turned slowly round to find the stranger standing at her side ; all the rest of the party were at the further end of the church.

"I came to fetch you to look into the sacristy," he explained.

"Have you been waiting?" she asked.

"Only a few minutes. I saw you were interested. There is no hurry."

They began to move across the vast, bare body of the church, empty of pew or chair.

May had slipped her other hand into his, and Robin left his aunt and went round to his other side.

"How dark it is!" whispered Sarah,

looking up at the small, unevenly placed windows.

“Yes, the Spanish churches in this part make me feel as though they had been built as refuges in time of war, rather than for worship,” he replied.

“Why didn’t one of the others come to fetch me? They ought not to have sent you,” she declared suddenly.

“They were all occupied. I noticed you were not with them. They did not send me.”

“I suppose you have been here numbers of times?” she said, when he had stopped for some minutes to relate to her the history of a certain saint whose virtues were recorded in a stained window.

“I know San Pascual tolerably well; I am fond of travelling.”

“And I have never travelled before. We should not be here now, only we missed the train, and we cannot get home till the evening express goes. And none of us can speak a word. And if we had not met you we might as well have been bats coming to

see this town, because we can't ask a question or read a word," cried Sarah.

"Hush!" ordered Robin, "you said we was in church. What a noise you are making! Isn't she?" he added, clutching the hand of their guide and compelling an answer.

He smiled.

"I do not think your sister will be very severely punished here."

"*Sister!*" they both cried. "She is our *aunt.*"

"Come, let us go outside; I don't want to see the sacristy. Look, the others are just ready to leave, and we can't talk in here. Do you mind waiting for them outside?"

"Not in the least," he declared with alacrity.

So the quartette turned, and waited on the steps of the porch.

"Are you coming with us?" asked Sarah, looking straight at him with her bright blue eyes.

"Do, oh do!" cried the children.

He looked pleased.

"You seem to be a large party, and to have plenty of guides," he said hesitatingly.

"We *were* a large party, but some of us have walked home, and have not I told you we have not a guide among us? But perhaps you are going somewhere to join your own party?" she added.

"No, I am alone."

"Dear me, how very dull! I should hate that. Do you like it best?"

"I am accustomed to it. I always take my holiday alone."

"Why does not your wife come with you?" she demanded.

He looked at her with a puzzled but amused air, and said quietly—

"I am not married."

"Oh, then you are an old bachelor like Uncle Dan, I suppose?" she said, stooping to put her niece's hat straight.

"I am thirty-two. Is that old?"

Sarah drew herself up tall and straight before him. She looked at him consideringly.

"It is younger than Uncle Dan, but it is ever so much older than I am. Eighteen,

you know, that is my age. Of course that accounts for your being so clever; you see you have had more time to learn things in than I have. What do you do all day? Are you in the Civil Service, like my brother-in-law, or do you live on your land, like we all do?"

"Neither. I am in business," he said, becoming suddenly grave. Then, dropping the children's hands, he added, "I think I must be going. I have told—your brother-in-law, I suppose it was—where to find a good place in which to dine."

"Oh, please wait a minute, unless you really *must* go. It seems such a pity, just as I want to ask you so many things. I never met anybody in business before. How interesting! Don't go just yet," implored Sarah.

"I do not think you would find it interesting at all," he said stiffly. "Good-bye."

"Ah, there you are. That's right!" cried Percy Meakin, issuing from the church door at the head of his party. "Do you happen to know the nearest way to that square

where the bull-fights used to be held? It would be a charity to show us the way, if you are not pressed for time. And just look at this map of mine, if you don't mind; is this the spot? Don't be such a nuisance, children; go and walk with Sarah."

The stranger glanced at her as if to see whether the name referred to her or not, then turned and walked on with Percy Meakin, examining the map he held open. The children again hung on to his hands. Gideon shook off Miss Clinton and came to his cousin's side. They walked on together.

"I am so sorry you have been left to that fellow," he began.

"You need not be sorry—I have been enjoying myself immensely; he has been explaining everything to me."

"Rather cool of him to stick himself on to us like this, isn't it?"

"My *dear* Gideon, he did not stick himself on, as you call it. Percy asked him to show him the way."

"Oh, well, I dare say he will be very use-

ful. Just look at those cloaks those fellows have on ! Awfully artistic, aren't they, thrown over the shoulder like that ? ”

Sarah laughed.

“ You should get one,” she said ; “ it would suit you.”

For the next hour or so the party trailed about, now stopping to look at shops, now wandering through a church, now halting in a square to admire the buildings. They came at last to some public gardens. Everybody was tired, and sank upon the benches.

“ Stay here,” ordered Percy Meakin. “ This is pretty near to the station and to a decent restaurant, you say ? ” and he turned to the stranger.

“ Yes,” he replied, “ that is why I have piloted you here. That is the post-office opposite ; your party can wait here while you send your telegrams. Your best plan will be to dine at the *table d'hôte* provided for the express at the frontier ; they leave more than an hour for it, you will find, before the train starts, then you need only have some light refreshment here.”

"A very good plan," returned Percy Meakin, with a relieved air. "Here, Gideon, come with me, will you, there's a good fellow."

Gideon rose reluctantly from the bench beside his cousin.

"Go on," she cried, "go and help him out. Poor Percy has felt a perfect Atlas this afternoon with all his responsibilities."

The stranger lingered near; he had not been asked either to go or stay.

Mrs. Meakin and the Clintons were sitting on Sarah's bench, young Ferdinand Smith leaned over it behind and talked to her. Sarah gave him only half her attention; she was wondering whether her sister would perceive that the stranger had walked a few paces off, and was standing with his back to them, apparently absorbed in gazing into the fountain. Finding that she pursued her conversation, Sarah called out with her usual decision—

"You had better come and sit down here, there is plenty of room."

It seemed that he did not hear. She

jumped up, went to him, and repeated her order.

"You have been taking such a lot of trouble for us, don't stand here by yourself," she urged.

His impassive face showed no sign of pleasure, but he came and sat down by her.

"You never asked *me* to sit there," murmured Ferdinand Smith in her ear.

"You did not need asking—he did," retorted Sarah, in a scornful whisper.

The youth shrugged his shoulders, laughed, and walked away to the bench where the others were sitting.

There were beds of spring flowers in the garden; children were playing in and out among the shrubs on the grass, or watched the sparkle of the water as it fell in showers into the basin of the fountain. Nurses walked up and down in white caps and handsome black dresses, many with their long hair hanging in a tail down their backs, tied with broad ribbons. Some wheeled dainty babies in dainty carriages, some led daintily dressed children by the hand. All

were talking and laughing. It was still daylight, but the light was waning. The soft spring air scarcely ruffled the spray of the steadily falling water.

Sarah Thornborough sat watching all this scene so new to her, so unlike anything else she had ever seen. The stranger, too, watched it all, and her.

The light died away in the west. The nurses collected their charges and went out by degrees through the great iron gates ; the garden was almost deserted.

The stranger turned to Mrs. Meakin.

"Your husband knows the restaurant, I have shown it to him. Unless your friends are accustomed to sitting out at nightfall, I would not advise you to remain here any longer. Will you allow me to take you to get some refreshment ? He will know where we are."

"You are very kind," she said somewhat haughtily, "perhaps that would be best ;" and rising, she collected her party, and guided by him they reached the restaurant.

Naturally the ordering of all their food fell to him.

"Do be so kind as to tell the waiter what we want; my sister will tell you," said Mrs. Meakin, languidly dropping on to the long low sofa and lifting her tired children up beside her. The rest of the party pulled up a table and joined it on to hers. Young Clinton sank exhausted on to the sofa, his anxious sisters sat down beside him, Mrs. Meakin handed them her smelling-bottle.

May began to whimper.

"I'm so *dreadfully* tired," she moaned.

"Make haste, Sarah; find out what everybody wants," cried her sister.

"I say, it's awfully good of you!" declared Sarah, when the stranger had duly translated the various orders for chocolate, tea, coffee, cakes, bread, butter, and wine.

He smiled.

"What else can I do for you?" he asked.

"Pour out the tea, will you? I want to cut this bread and butter for the children. Miss Clinton, you are looking after your table, I know."

"Would you ask your friend to be kind

enough to order us some milk?" asked that lady.

Sarah looked in the stranger's face laughingly.

"Do you hear? You are considered my special 'find.' I hope you don't mind?"

"Do *you*?" he asked, reaching over to Mrs. Meakin's cup with his teapot.

"Do I what?"

"Mind my being regarded as your special 'find'?"

"Oh dear no. I am sure I do not know what we should have done without you. Not so much tea in Robin's cup, please; he has it nearly all milk. There, Mabel, drink yours; it will do you good, though it is such poor stuff. This is cinnamon powdered in my chocolate—how queer!" she continued, when she was at last at liberty to begin her own repast.

"Will you take nothing yourself?" asked Mabel Meakin, as she languidly sipped her tea.

"No, thank you; I dine in an hour," he replied, looking at his watch.

"How very kind of you to wait with us ! We are all too tired to be amusing, I am afraid," declared Sarah.

Here Percy Meakin and Gideon rejoined them.

Sarah dragged forward an empty chair at her side, and called her cousin to her.

"Come, I have kept a cup of chocolate for you. Sit by me, dear boy."

He devoted himself to her during the rest of the meal, and Percy Meakin discussed with the stranger whether there would be time to go to a hat-shop to purchase a particularly artistic, drooping shape which had taken his fancy.

It ended in their all adjourning thither on their way to the station. Mrs. Meakin woke up and became quite lively over trying hats on to Robin. The Clintons and the Ferdinand Smiths went on to the station and carried Gideon off with them. Sarah remained, at her sister's request, to look after the children.

The shop was lighted up ; it was dark in the narrow street outside. The stately proprietor leaned against his counter grimly

watching them making free with his goods. Sarah got tired of waiting, and went to the door. There, to her surprise, leaning against the shop window was the stranger, staring into the night and smoking a cigarette.

"I thought you had gone on with the others," she said.

He turned towards her, threw his cigarette into the road, and replied—

"No, I waited for your brother-in-law. He will get cheated without me."

Sarah opened her eyes wide.

"How *very* kind of you! I should think your people must be awfully fond of you, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Have you got a father and mother, or are they dead, like mine?"

"They are both dead. But you are young to have lost both parents."

"Oh, I am used to it, it was so long ago. Besides, when you have a really good uncle, like my Uncle Dan, it does just as well, you know. Are you an only child, like me? Mabel doesn't count, she's married."

"I have two married sisters and one unmarried ; she is a hospital nurse."

"Oh, that brings me back to what we were talking about just now. Your business, do you like it?"

"Extremely."

"What sort of things do you do?"

He smiled.

"Do you really wish me to tell you?"

"Of course, or I should not have asked. Make haste!" she cried impatiently.

"Sarah!" called Percy Meakin from within.

"There, I knew we should get interrupted," she said in a vexed voice, as she went back into the shop.

Mr. Meakin wanted his help, as the stranger had foreseen. When the transaction was over, and they passed out into the street, Mabel took her husband's arm. Sarah, intent upon gaining her point, dropped a little behind with the tired children, and, as they approached the bridge, she found the stranger at her side.

The night was a brilliant one ; many stars were already visible in the clear sky, though

the lingering glow in the west outshone the greater number of them. The river, coming from among the tall dark houses, ran swift and silent under the bridge on one side, while out from beneath it on the other, it hurried into the shimmering sea not many yards away. They came across the bridge on to a square. A few people were leisurely crossing it. The trees were in bud ; their tassel-laden branches waved in the evening breeze, and cast patterns of delicate tracery on the ground. The balmy scents of a spring evening were in the air.

“ What a lovely night ! ” said Sarah, taking a deep breath. Her companion stopped a moment, as if absorbed in some thought ; he swept his hand towards the sky, saying—

“ ‘ Ye heavens . . .

You remain

A world above man’s head, to let him see
 How boundless might his soul’s horizon be,
 How vast, yet of what clear transparency !
 How it were good to live there, and breathe free ;
 How fair a lot to fill
 Is left to each man still ! ’ ”

“ Why, you say poetry almost as well as

Uncle Dan!" declared Sarah, admiringly, as they walked on again.

"It just came into my head," he said apologetically. "Do you not think it applies to a night like this?"

"Yes; but then I don't think I ever doubted but that all our 'lots' are 'fair.'"

"That shows you have never had any trouble," he said.

"No, I have not, and I don't intend to have. Trouble is generally people's own fault. I mean to keep out of it. I should be *so* angry if I had a great deal of trouble. I am sure it would not do me any good at all," she declared rebelliously.

"You will not be able to avoid it, and it might not be the best thing for you if you could. You had better make up your mind to meet it bravely, and be strong in spite of it. Trouble is the lot of every man, at some time in his life," he said sadly.

"Has it fallen to yours?" she demanded.

"Oh yes."

Sarah walked on, kicking the pebbles with her old childish impatience.

“Well, I don’t want to hear about it, anyway. Tell me what your business is, please.”

“We make all kinds of agricultural implements, we employ a large number of hands, we are interested in everything of the kind that is used in other countries. But why should I tell you about it? People care more to hear about events or books or languages; they are seldom interested in hearing how things are made.”

“I am,” cried Sarah, eagerly. “I am, so is Uncle Dan. Uncle Dol is not. I suppose you are used to people like him. He buys a ‘reaper,’ for instance, and does not trouble in the least how it is made. *We* like to know. But then you must study drawings. When catalogues come, we—I mean Jacob Frant, he is our bailiff, and Uncle Dan and I—understand the pictures ever so much better than anybody else round us, because we can all draw all the parts. Can you draw?”

“Certainly. I know how each part of each machine is made. I have established

evening classes for the youths in our employ. I wish them to grow into intelligent workmen, who will see the beauty of what they are doing, and——”

“I’m so dreadf’ly tired!” sighed Robin, suddenly stopping. “Can’t you carry me, Auntie Sarah?”

“Let me,” said the stranger, lifting the boy in his arms.

“Shall I carry you, May?” asked Sarah.

But May’s legs were sturdier than Robin’s, and she dragged on her way, supported by her aunt’s firm hand.

“Where is your home?” Sarah demanded suddenly.

“I have none.”

“Nonsense!” she returned, laughing.

“A patch of ground with four walls built on it, surrounding some tables and chairs, does not constitute a ‘home,’ does it?”

“Dear me, what a funny way of putting it! Well, where do you keep all your treasures, the things you like best?”

“In a little shanty in the mountains, not far from here. But I will not joke with

you. I understand what you wish to know. I live chiefly in lodgings in London. I see to all the town part of our business. Our works are not in London."

"How dreadfully dull!" she bemoaned.

The lights of the station gleamed near them; it wanted but five minutes by the clock to the hour the train would start. They hurried into the station. Percy Meakin took his tired son from the stranger's arms.

"I am sure I am extremely obliged to you for all your help. We are all leaving in a day or two, or I would ask you to come and see us."

"Thank you. My wanderings are uncertain."

Mrs. Meakin held out her hand.

"Good-bye. We are most grateful to you, I am sure."

"Come, make haste! We must not end by losing *this* train!" cried her husband, hurrying her away.

The stranger turned to Sarah. She held out her hand impulsively.

"Oh, *what* a pity we must say good-bye!

I do hope you will enjoy yourself. I wish you were not travelling alone. It must be so dull. I *am* so glad we met you. I shall tell Uncle Dan all about you. Just the most interesting part at the last. I *did* so want to hear more about your business. Good-bye. Oh yes, Gideon, I'm just coming."

"Good-bye," said the stranger, as he shook hands. Then suddenly he laid his other hand over hers, and held it for a moment, while he looked thoughtfully in her face and in a low voice repeated, "Good-bye. I thank you for to-day. I hope you will remain always just as you are now."

Then he lifted his hat and went out of the station. Gideon Leigh was hurrying towards her. She seized him by the hand, and together they rushed into the train just as it moved off.

"My first and last day in Spain, I expect," she said gaily. "Oh, dear boy, that *is* a nice man. I wish I had asked him his name."

"You exchanged cards, didn't you, Percy?" asked Gideon.

"Yes, but I dropped his. It doesn't matter," answered Percy Meakin, yawning.

"He must have enjoyed himself immensely," whispered Gideon; "he had you to talk to quite a long time."

"Everybody does not think as much of me as you do," she returned. "Here, put my hat up in the rack, will you? I can't lean back in it, and I am getting so sleepy. Come, Robin, you and I will have a doze together."

She took the boy on her knee; Gideon covered them both over with a shawl, and Sarah closed her eyes. For the first time in her life her thoughts went backwards instead of forwards. She felt again her hand warmly clasped, and heard an earnest voice say, "I hope you will always remain just as you are now." "I wonder what he could possibly have meant?" was her thought as she finally fell asleep.

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